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ON

TERMS OF COMMUNION;

WITH A

PARTICULAR VIEW TO THE CASE

OF THE

BAPTISTS AND PÆDOBAPTISTS.

BY ROBERT HALL, M. A.

"That they all may be one, as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee; that they also may be one in us; that the world may know that thou hast sent me."..... JESUS CHRIST.

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PREFACE.

THE love of controversy was in no degree the motive for writing the following sheets. Controversy the Writer considers as an evil, though often a necessary one. It is to be deprecated when it is directed to minute or frivolous objects, or when it is managed in such a manner as to call forth malevolent passions. He hopes the ensuing treatise will be found free from both these objections; and that as the subject must be allowed to be of some importance, so the spirit in which it is handled, is not chargeable with any material departure from the christian temper. If the Author has expressed himself on some occasions with considerable confidence, he trusts the reader will impute it, not to a forgetfulness of his personal deficiencies, but to the cause he has undertaken to support. The divided state of the christian world has long been the subject of painful reflection; and if his feeble efforts might be the means of uniting a small portion of it only in closer ties, he will feel himself amply rewarded.

The practice of incorporating private opinions and human inventions with the constitutions of a church, and with the terms of communion, has long appeared to him untenable in its principle, and pernicious in its effects.

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There is no position in the whole compass of theology, of the truth of which he feels a stronger persuasion, than that no man, or set of men, are entitled to prescribe as an indispensable condition of communion, what the New Testament has not enjoined as a condition of salvation. To establish this position, is the principal object of the following work; and though it is more immediately occupied in the discussion of a case which respects the Baptists and the Pædobaptists, that case is attempted to be decided entirely upon the principle now mentioned, and it is no more than the application of it to a particular instance.

The Writer is persuaded, that a departure from this principle in the denomination to which he belongs, has been extremely injurious, not only to the credit and prosperity of that particular body, (which is a very subordinate consideration,) but to the general interests of truth; and that but for the obstruction arising from that quarter, the views they entertain of one of the sacraments would have obtained a more extensive prevalence. By keeping themselves in a state of separation and seclusion from other Christians, they have not only evinced an inattention to some of the most important injunctions of scripture, but have raised up an invincible barrier to the propagation of their sentiments beyond the precincts of their own party.

It has been insinuated, that the Author has taken an unfair advantage of his opponents by chusing to bring forward this disquisition, just at the moment when we have to lament the loss of a person whose judgment

would have disposed, and his abilities enabled him to do ample justice to the opposite side of the question. He can assure his readers, that none entertained a higher veneration for Mr. Fuller than himself, notwithstanding their difference of sentiment on this subject: and that when he entered on this discussion, it was with the fullest expectation of having his opposition to encounter. At that time, his state of health, though not good, was such as suggested a hope that the event was very distant which we all deplore. Having been led to mention this affecting circumstance, I cannot refrain from expressing in a few words, the sentiments of affectionate veneration with which I always regarded that excellent person while living, and cherish his memory now that he is no more; a man, whose sagacity enabled him to penetrate to the depths of every subject he explored; whose conceptions were so powerful and luminous, that what was recondite and original appeared familiar; what was intricate, easy and perspicuous, in his hands; equally successful in enforcing the practical, stating the theoretical, and discussing the polemical branches of theology: without the advantage of early education, he rose to high distinction among the religious writers of his day, and in the midst of a most active and laborious life, left monuments of his piety and genius which will survive to distant posterity. Were I making his eulogium, I should necessarily dwell on the spotless integrity of his private life, his fidelity in friendship, his neglect of self interest, his ardent attachment to truth, and especially the series of unceasing labours and exertions in superintending the mission to India, to which he most probably fell a victim. He had nothing feeble or unde-

cisive in his character, but to every undertaking in which he engaged, he brought all the powers of his understanding, all the energies of his heart; and if he were less distinguished by the comprehension, than the acumen and solidity of his thoughts; less eminent for the gentler graces, than for stern integrity and native grandeur of mind, we have only to remember the necessary limitations of human excellence. While he endeared himself to his denomination by a long course of most useful labour, by his excellent works on the Socinian and Deistical controversies, as well as his devotion to the cause of missions, he laid the world under lasting obligations. Though he was known to profess different views from the Writer on the subject under present discussion, it may be inferred from a *decisive fact*, which it is not necessary to record, that his attachment to them was not very strong, nor his conviction probably very powerful. Be this as it may, his sanction of the practice of exclusive communion, has no doubt contributed in no small degree to recommend it to the denomination of which he was so distinguished an ornament. They who are the first to disclaim human authority in the affairs of religion, are not always least susceptible of its influence.

It is observable also, that bodies of men are very slow in changing their opinions, which with some inconveniencies is productive of this advantage, that truth undergoes a severer investigation, and her conquests are the more permanent for being gradually acquired. On this account the Writer is not so sanguine as to expect his performance will occasion any sudden revolution in the sentiments and practice of the class of Christians more

immediately concerned; if along with other causes it ultimately contribute to so desirable an issue, he shall be satisfied.

It may not be improper to assign the reason for not noticing the treatise of the celebrated Mr. Robinson, of Cambridge, on the same subject. It is not because he is insensible to the ingenuity and beauty of that performance, as well as of the other works of that original and extraordinary writer; but because it rests on principles more lax and latitudinarian, than it is in his power conscientiously to adopt; Mr. Robinson not having adverted, as far as he perceives, to the distinction of fundamentals, but constructed his plea for toleration,* in such a manner, as to comprehend all the varieties of religious belief.

The only author I have professed to answer, is the late venerable Booth, his treatise being generally considered by our opponents as the ablest defence of their hypothesis.

I have only to add, that I commit the following treatise to the candour of the publick, and the blessing of God, hoping, that as it is designed not to excite, but to allay animosities; not to widen, but to heal the breaches among Christians, it will meet with the indulgence due to good intentions, however feebly executed.

* The intelligent reader will understand me to refer, not to civil toleration by the state, but that which is exercised by religious societies.

ON TERMS OF COMMUNION.

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS.

WHOEVER forms his ideas of the Church of Christ from an attentive perusal of the New Testament, will perceive that *unity* is one of its essential characteristicks; and that though it be branched out into many distinct societies, it is still but one. "The Church," says Cyprian, "is one, which, by reason of its fecundity, is extended into a multitude, in the same manner as the rays of the sun, however numerous, constitute but one light; and the branches of a tree, however many, are attached to one trunk, which is supported by its tenacious root; and when various rivers flow from the same fountain, though number is diffused by the redundant supply of waters, unity is preserved in their origin." Nothing more abhorrent from the principles and maxims of the sacred oracles can be conceived, than the idea of a plurality of true churches, neither in actual communion with each other, nor in a capacity for such communion. Though this rending of the seamless garment of our Saviour, this schism in the members of his mystical body, is by far the greatest calamity which has befallen the christian interest, and one of the most fatal effects of the great apostacy foretold by the sacred penman, we have been so long familiarised to it as to be scarcely sensible of its enormity, nor does it excite surprise or concern, in any degree proportioned to what would be felt by one who had contemplated the church in the first ages. To see christian societies regarding each other with the jealousies of rival empires, each aiming to raise itself on the ruin of all others, making extravagant boasts of superiour purity, generally in exact proportion to their departures from it, and scarcely deigning to acknowledge

the possibility of obtaining salvation out of their pale, is the odious and disgusting spectacle which modern Christianity presents. The bond of charity, which unites the genuine followers of Christ in distinction from the world, is dissolved, and the very terms by which it was wont to be denoted, exclusively employed to express a predilection for a sect. The evils which result from this state of division are incalculable: it supplies infidels with their most plausible topicks of invective; it hardens the consciences of the irreligious, weakens the hands of the good, impedes the efficacy of prayer, and is probably the principal obstruction to that ample effusion of the spirit, which is essential to the renovation of the world.

It is easier however, it is confessed, to deplore the malady, than to prescribe the cure: for however important the preservation of harmony and peace, the interests of truth and holiness are still more so; nor must we forget the order in which the graces of the Spirit are arranged. "The wisdom which is from above is first *pure*, then *peaceable*." Peace should be anxiously sought, but always in subordination to purity, and therefore every attempt to reconcile the differences among Christians which involves the sacrifice of truth, or the least deliberate deviation from the revealed will of Christ, is spurious in its origin, and dangerous in its tendency. If communion with a christian society cannot be had without a compliance with rites and usages which we deem idolatrous or superstitious, or without a surrender of that liberty in which we are commanded to stand fast, we must, as we value our allegiance, forego, however reluctantly, the advantages of such a union. Wherever purity and simplicity of worship are violated by the heterogeneous mixture of human inventions, we are not at liberty to comply with them for the sake of peace, because the first consideration in every act of worship is its correspondence with the revealed will of God, which will often justify us in declining the *external* communion of a church with which we cease not to cultivate a communion in spirit. It is one thing to decline a connexion with the members of a community *absolutely*, or simply because they belong to such a community, and another to join with them in practices which we deem superstitious and erroneous.

In the latter instance, we cannot be said absolutely to refuse a connexion with the pious part of such societies, we decline it merely because it is clogged with conditions which render it impracticable. It is impossible for a Protestant Dissenter, for example, without manifest inconsistency, to become a member of the Established Church; but to admit the members of that community to participate at the Lord's table, without demanding a formal renunciation of their peculiar sentiments, includes nothing contradictory or repugnant. The cases are totally distinct, and the reasons which would apply forcibly against the former, would be irrelevant to the latter. In the first supposition, the Dissenter, by an active concurrence in what he professes to disapprove, ceases to dissent; in the last, no principle is violated, no practice is altered, no innovation is introduced.

Hence arises a question, how far we are justified in repelling from our communion those, from whom we differ on matters confessedly not essential to salvation, when that communion is accompanied with no innovation in the rites of worship, merely on account of diversity of sentiment on other subjects. In other words, are we at liberty, or are we not, to walk with our christian brethren *as far as we are agreed*, or must we renounce their fellowship on account of errour allowed not to be fundamental, although nothing is proposed to be done, or omitted, in such acts of communion, which would not equally be done, or omitted, on the supposition of their absence? Such is the precise state of the question which it is my intention to discuss in these pages; and it may possibly contribute to its elucidation to observe, that the true idea of christian communion is by no means confined to a joint participation of the Lord's supper. He who in the words of the Apostle's creed expresses his belief in the *communion* of *saints*, adverts to much more than is comprehended in one particular act. In an intelligent assent to that article, is comprehended the total of that sympathy and affection, with all its natural expressions and effects, by which the followers of Christ are united, in consequence of their union with their head, and their joint share in the common salvation. The kiss of charity in the apostolick age, the right hand of fellowship, a share in the oblations of the

church, a commendatory epistle attesting the exemplary character of the bearer, uniting in social prayer, the employment of the term brother or sister to denote spiritual consanguinity, were all considered in the purest ages as tokens of *communion;* a term which is never applied in the New Testament exclusively to the Lord's supper. When it is used in connexion with that rite, it is employed, not to denote the fellowship of Christians, but the spiritual participation of the body and blood of Christ.*

When we engage a christian brother to present supplications to God in our behalf, it cannot be doubted that we have fellowship with him, not less real or spiritual than at the Lord's table. From these considerations it is natural to infer, that no scruple ought to be entertained respecting the lawfulness of uniting to commemorate our Saviour's death, with those with whom we feel ourselves at liberty to join in every other branch of religious worship. Where no attempt is made to obscure its import, or impair its simplicity, by the introduction of human ceremonies, but it is proposed to be celebrated in the manner which we apprehend to be perfectly consonant to the mind of Christ, it would seem less reasonable to refuse to co-operate in this branch of religion than in any other, because it is appointed to be a memorial of the greatest instance of love that was ever exhibited, as well as the principal pledge of christian fraternity. It must appear surprising, that the rite which of all others is most adapted to cement mutual attachment, and which is in a great measure appointed for that purpose, should be fixed upon as the line of demarcation, the impassable barrier, to separate and disjoin the followers of Christ. He who admits his fellow Christians to share in every other spiritual privilege, while he prohibits his approach to the Lord's table, entertains a view of that institution, diametrically opposite to what has usually prevailed; he must consider it not so much in the light of a commemoration of his Saviour's death and passion, as a religious test, designed to ascertain and establish an agreement in points not fundamental. According to this notion of it, it is no longer a symbol of our common Christianity, it is the

* 1 Corinthians x. 16.

badge and criterion of a party, a mark of discrimination applied to distinguish the nicer shades of difference among Christians. How far either scripture or reason can be adduced in support of such a view of the subject, it will be the business of the following pages to inquire.

In the mean while, it will be necessary, in order to render the argument perfectly intelligible, to premise a few words, respecting the particular controversy on which the ensuing observations are meant especially to bear. Few of my readers probably require to be informed, that there is a class of Christians pretty widely diffused through these realms, who deny the validity of infant-baptism, considering it as a human invention, not countenanced by the scriptures, nor by the practice of the first and purest ages. Besides their denial of the right of infants to baptism, they also contend for the exclusive validity of immersion in that ordinance, in distinction from the sprinkling or pouring of water. In support of the former, they allege the total silence of scripture respecting the baptism of infants, together with their incompetence to comprehend the truths, or sustain the engagements, which they conceive it designed to exhibit. For the latter, they urge the well-known import of the original word employed to express the baptismal rite, which they allege cannot, without the most unnatural violence, be understood to command any thing less than an *immersion* of the whole body. The class of Christians whose sentiments I am relating, are usually known by the appellation of *Baptists;* in contradistinction from whom, all other Christians may properly be denominated *Pædobaptists.* It is not my intention to enter into a defence of their peculiar tenets, though they have my unqualified approbation; but merely to state them for the information of my readers. It must be obvious that in the judgment of the Baptists, such as have only received the baptismal rite in their infancy must be deemed in reality *unbaptized;* for this is only a different mode of expressing their conviction of the invalidity of infant-sprinkling. On this ground, they have for the most part confined their communion to persons of their own persuasion, in which, illiberal as it may appear, they are supported by the general practice of the christian world, which, whatever diversities of opinion may have

prevailed, have generally concurred in insisting upon baptism as an indispensible prerequisite to the Lord's table. The effect which has resulted in this particular case has indeed been singular, but it has arisen from a rigid adherence to a principle almost universally adopted, that baptism is, under all circumstances, a necessary prerequisite to the Lord's supper. The practice we are now specifying has usually been termed *strict communion*, while the opposite practice of admitting sincere Christians to the eucharist, though in our judgment not baptized, is styled *free communion.* Strict communion is the general practice of our churches, though the abettors of the opposite opinion are rapidly increasing both in numbers and in respectability. The humble hope of casting some additional light on a subject which appears to me of no trivial importance, is my only motive for composing this treatise, in which it will be necessary to attempt the establishment of principles sufficiently comprehensive to decide other questions in ecclesiastical polity, besides those which concern the present controversy. I am greatly mistaken if it be possible to bring it to a satisfactory issue, without adverting to topicks in which the christian world are not less interested than the Baptists. If the conclusions we shall endeavour to establish, appear on impartial inquiry to be well founded, it will follow that serious errours respecting terms of communion have prevailed to a wide extent in the christian church. It will be my anxious endeavour, in the progress of this discussion, to avoid whatever is calculated to irritate; and instead of acting the part of a pleader, to advance no argument which has not been well weighed, and of whose validity I am not perfectly convinced. The inquiry will be pursued under two parts; in the first, I shall consider the arguments in favour of *strict communion;* in the second, state with all possible brevity the evidence by which we attempt to sustain the opposite practice.

PART I.

ARGUMENTS FOR STRICT COMMUNION CONSIDERED.

In reviewing the arguments which are usually urged for the practice of *strict communion*, or the exclusion of unbaptised persons from the Lord's table, I shall chiefly confine myself to the examination of such as are adduced by the venerable Mr. Booth, in his treatise styled "An Apology for the Baptists," because he is not only held in the highest esteem by the whole denomination, but is allowed by his partizans to have exhibited the full force of their cause. He writes on the subject under discussion, with all his constitutional ardour and confidence, which, supported by the spotless integrity, and elevated sanctity of the man, have contributed, more perhaps than any other cause, to fortify the Baptists in their prevailing practice. I trust the free strictures which it will be necessary to make on his performance, will not be deemed inconsistent with a sincere veneration for his character, which I should be sorry to see treated with the unsparing ridicule and banter, with which he has assailed Mr. Bunyan, a name equally dear to genius and to piety. The reader will not expect me to follow him in his declamatory excursions, or in those miscellaneous quotations, often irrelevant, which the extent of his reading has supplied: it will suffice if I carefully examine his arguments, without omitting a single consideration on which he could be supposed to lay a stress.

SECTION I.

The argument from the order of time in which baptism and the Lord's supper are supposed to have been instituted.

One of the principal pleas in favour of *strict communion* is derived from the supposed *priority* of the institution of baptism to the Lord's supper. "That baptism was an ordinance of God," say our opponents, "that submission to it was required, that it was administered to multitudes before the sacred supper was heard of, are undeniable facts. There never was a time since the minis-

try of our Lord's successors, in which it was not the duty of repenting and believing sinners to be baptized. The venerable John, the twelve Apostles, and the *Son of God* incarnate, all united in commanding baptism, at a time when it would have been impious to have eaten bread, and drank wine, as an ordinance of divine worship. Baptism, therefore, had the *priority* in point of institution, which is a presumptive evidence that it has, and ever will have, a prior claim to our obedience. So under the ancient economy, *sacrifices* and *circumcision* were appointed and practised in the patriarchal ages: in the time of Moses, the *paschal feast*, and *burning incense* in the holy place, were appointed by the God of Israel. But the two former being prior in point of institution, always had the priority in point of administration."*

As this is a leading argument, and will go far towards determining the point at issue, the reader will excuse the examination of it being extended to some length. It proceeds obviously entirely on a matter of fact, which it assumes as undeniable, the *priority* in *point of time* of the institution of christian baptism, to that of the Lord's supper; and this again rests on another assumption, which is the identity of John's baptism with that of our Lord. If it should clearly appear that these were two distinct institutes, the argument will be reversed, and it will be evident that the eucharist was appointed and celebrated before christian baptism existed. Let me request the reader not to be startled at the paradoxical air of this assertion, but to lend an impartial attention to the following reasons:

1. The commission to baptize all nations, which was executed by the Apostles after our Saviour's resurrection, originated in his *express command;* John's baptism, it is evident, had no such origin. John had baptized for some time before he knew him: it is certain then, that he did not receive his commission from him. "And I knew him not," saith he, "but that he should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water." If the manifesting Christ to Israel was the end and design of John's mission, he must have been in a previous state of

* Booth's Apology, page 41.

obscurity; not in a situation to act the part of a legislator by enacting laws or establishing rites. John uniformly ascribes his commission, not to Christ, but the Father, so that to assert his baptism to be a *christian* institute, is not to interpret, but to contradict him. "And I knew him not," is his language, "but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost. And I saw, and bare record, that this is the Son of God." It was not till he had accredited his mission, by many miracles, and other demonstrations of a preternatural power and wisdom, that our Lord proceeded to modify religion by new institutions, of which the eucharist is the first example. But a christian ordinance not founded on the authority of Christ, not the effect, but the means of his manifestation, and which was first executed by one who knew him not, is to me an incomprehensible mystery.

2. The baptism of John was the baptism of *repentance*, or reformation, as a preparation for the approaching kingdom of God: the institute of Christ included an explicit profession of faith in a particular person, as the Lord of that kingdom. The ministry of John was the voice of one crying in the wilderness, "Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths strait." All he demanded of such as repaired to him, was to declare their conviction that the Messiah was shortly to appear, to repent of their sins, and resolve to frame their lives in a manner agreeable to such an expectation, without requiring a belief in any existing individual as the Messiah. They were merely to express their readiness to *believe on him who was to come*,* on the reasonable supposition that his actual appearance would not fail to be accompanied with attestations sufficient to establish his pretensions. The profession required in a candidate for *christian* baptism, involved an *historical* faith, a belief in a certain individual, an illustrious personage, who had wrought miracles, declared himself the Son of God, was crucified under Pontius Pilate, and rose again the third day. As the conviction demanded in the two cases was *totally distinct*, it

* Acts xix. 4.

was possible for him who sincerely avowed the one, to be destitute of the other; and though the rejection of Christ by John's converts would have been criminal and destructive of salvation, it would not have been self-contradictory, or absurd, since he might sincerely believe on his testimony that the Christ was shortly to appear, and make some preparations for his approach, who was not satisfied with his character, when he was actually manifested.

That such was the real situation of the great body of the Jewish people, at our Lord's advent, is evident from the evangelical records. In short, the profession demanded in the baptism of John was nothing more than a solemn recognition of that great article of the Jewish faith, the appearance of the Messiah, accompanied indeed with this additional circumstance, that it was nigh at hand. The faith required by the Apostles included a persuasion of all the miraculous facts which they attested, comprehending the preternatural conception, the Deity, incarnation and atonement, the miracles, the death, and the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. In the one was contained a general expectation of the speedy appearance of an illustrious person under the character of the Messiah; in the other, an explicit declaration that Jesus of Nazareth, whose life and death are recorded in the Evangelists, was the identical person. But in order to constitute an identity in religious rites, two things are requisite, a *sameness* in the corporeal action, and a sameness in the import. The *action* may be the same, yet the rites totally different, or christian baptism must be confounded with legal Jewish purifications, the greater part of which consisted in a total immersion of the body in water. The diversity of signification, the distinct uses to which they were applied, constitute their only difference, but quite sufficient to render it absurd to consider them as one and the same. And surely he is guilty of a similar mistake who misled by the exact resemblance of the actions physically considered, confounds the rite intended to announce the future, though speedy appearance of the Messiah, without defining his person, and the ceremony expressive of a firm belief in an identical person, as already manifested under that illustrious character.

3. Christian baptism was invariably administered in the *name of Jesus;* while there is sufficient evidence that John's was not performed in that name. That it was not during the first stage of his ministry is certain, because we learn from his own declaration, that when he first executed his commission he did not know him, but was previously apprised of a miraculous sign, which should serve to identify him when he appeared. In order to obviate the suspicion of collusion or conspiracy, circumstances were so arranged, that John remained ignorant of the person of the Saviour, and possessed at the commencement of his career, that knowledge only of the Messiah, which was common to enlightened Jews. If we suppose him at a subsequent period to have incorporated the name of Jesus with his institute, an alteration so striking would unquestionably have been noticed by the Evangelists, as it must have occasioned among the people much speculation and surprise, of which, however, no traces are perceptible. Besides, it is impossible to peruse the gospels with attention, without remarking the extreme reserve maintained by our Lord, with respect to his claim to the character of Messiah, that he studiously avoided, until his arraignment before the High Priest, the publick declaration of that fact, that he wrought his principal miracles in the obscure province of Galilee, often accompanied with strict injunctions of secrecy; and that the whole course of his ministry, till its concluding scene, was so conducted, as at once to afford sincere inquirers sufficient evidence of his mission, and to elude the malice of his enemies. In descending from the mount of transfiguration, where he had been proclaimed the Son of God from *the most excellent glory*, he strictly charged the disciples who accompanied him to tell no man of it, till he was raised from the dead. The appellation he constantly assumed was that of the Son of Man, which, whatever be its precise import, could by no construction become the ground of a criminal charge. When at the feast of dedication, "the Jews came around him in the temple, saying, how long dost thou keep us in suspense; if thou be the Christ tell us plainly:" he replied, "I have told you, and ye believe not: the works which I do in my Father's name

they bear witness of me."* From this passage it is evident that our Lord had not hitherto publickly and explicitly affirmed himself to be the Messiah, or there would have been no foundation for the complaint of these Jews; nor does he on this occasion expressly affirm it, but refers them to the testimony of his works, without specifying the precise import of that attestation. In the progress of his discourse, however, he advances nearer to an open declaration of his Messiah-ship, than on any former occasion, affirming his Father and himself to be one, in consequence of which the people attempt to stone him, as guilty of blasphemy, in making himself the Son of God. As his time was not yet come, he still maintains a degree of his wonted caution, and vindicates his assumption of that honour, upon principles far inferiour to what he might justly have urged. Yet such was the effect of this discourse, that in order to screen himself from the fury of his enemies, he found it necessary immediately to retire beyond Jordan. In an advanced stage of his ministry, we find him inquiring of his disciples the prevailing opinions entertained respecting himself; on which they reply, "Some say, thou art John the Baptist, others Elias, others Jeremiah, or one of the Prophets." That he was the Messiah, was not, it is evident, the opinion generally entertained at that time, by such as were most favourably disposed towards his character and pretensions, which it could not fail to have been, had this title been publickly proclaimed; but this was so far from his intention, that when Peter, in the name of the rest of the Apostles, uttered that glorious confession, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God;" our Lord immediately enjoins secrecy. What he enjoined his disciples not to publish, he certainly did not publish himself, nor for the same reason suffer it to be indiscriminately proclaimed by his forerunner. But if we suppose John to baptize in his name, we must suppose what is equivalent to an explicit declaration of his being the Messiah; for since he on all occasions predicted the speedy appearance of that great personage, the people could not fail to identify with him, the individual whose name was thus employed, and all the precau-

* John x. 22, 30.

tions maintained by our Saviour would have been utterly defeated. For what possible purpose could he forbid his disciples to publish, what John is supposed to have promulgated as often as he administered the baptismal rite? and how shall we account, on this hypothesis, for the diversity of opinion which prevailed respecting his character, among those who were thoroughly convinced of the Divine mission of that great Prophet? From these considerations, in addition to the total silence of scripture, the judicious reader, I presume, will conclude without hesitation, that John did *not* baptize in the name of Jesus, which is an essential ingredient in Christian baptism; and though it is administered, in fact, in the name of each person of the blessed Godhead, not in that of the Son only, this instead of impairing, strengthens the argument, by enlarging still farther the difference betwixt the two ordinances in question; for none will contend that John immersed his disciples in the name of the Holy Trinity.

4. The baptism instituted by our Lord, is in scripture distinguished from that of the forerunner, by the *superiour effects* with which it was accompanied; so that instead of being confounded, they are contrasted in the sacred historians. "I, indeed," said John, "baptize you with water unto repentance, but there cometh one after me who is mightier than I—he shall baptize you in the Holy Ghost, and in fire." The rite administered by John was a mere immersion in water, unaccompanied with that effusion of the spirit, that redundant supply of supernatural gifts and graces which distinguished the subjects of the christian institute. On the passage just quoted, St. Chrysostom has the following comment:—"Having agitated their minds with the fear of future judgment, and the expectation of punishment, and the mention of the axe, and the rejection of their ancestors, and the substitution of a new race, together with the double menace of excision and burning, and by all these means softened their obduracy, and disposed them to a desire of deliverance from these evils, he then introduces the mention of Christ, not in a simple manner, but with much elevation; in exhibiting his own disparity, lest he should appear to be using the language of compliment, he commences by stating a comparison betwixt the benefit bestowed by each. For he

did not immediately say, I am not worthy to unloose the latchet of his shoes, but having first stated the *insignificance* of his own baptism, and shewn that it had no effect beyond bringing them to repentance, (for he did not style it the water of remission, but of repentance,) he proceeds to the baptism ordained by Christ, which was replete with an *ineffable gift*."* This eminent Father, we perceive, insists on the prodigious inferiority of the ceremony performed by John to the christian sacrament, from its being merely a symbol of repentance, without comprehending the remission of sins,† or the donation of the Spirit. The Evangelists, Mark and Luke, it is true, affirm that John preached the baptism of repentance *for* the remission of sins, whence we are entitled to infer, that the rite which he administered, when accompanied with suitable dispositions, was important in the order of preparation, not that it was accompanied with the immediate or actual collation of that benefit.

Such as repented at his call, stood fair candidates for the blessings of the approaching dispensation, among which, an assurance of pardon, the adoption of children, and the gift of the Spirit, held the most conspicuous place; blessings of which it was the office of John to excite the expectation, but of Christ to bestow. The effusion of the Spirit, indeed, in the multifarious forms of his miraculous and sanctifying operation, may be considered as equivalent to them all; and this, we are distinctly told, was not given (save in a very scanty manner) during our Lord's abode upon earth, because he was not yet glorified. Reserved to adorn the triumph of the ascended Saviour, the Apostles were commanded to wait at Jerusalem until it was bestowed, which was on the day of Pentecost, when "a sound from heaven, as of a mighty wind, filled the place where they were assembled, and cloven tongues of fire sat upon each of them, and they were filled with the Holy Ghost." This was the first example of that baptism of the Spirit, as the author of which, John asserts the immense superiority of the Messiah, not to himself only, but to all preceding prophets. In the subsequent history, we perceive that this gift was, on all ordinary

* Homily xi. on Matthew. † Mark i. 4. Luke iii. 3.

occasions, conferred in connexion with baptism. In this connexion, it is exhibited by St. Peter in his address on the day of Pentecost:—"Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost."

Thus it was also in the case of Saul of Tarsus. Agreeable to our Lord's prediction of the signs which should accompany them that believe, there is reason to suppose, a greater or less measure of these supernatural endowments, regularly accompanied the imposition of the hands of the Apostles on primitive converts, immediately subsequent to their baptism; which affords an easy solution to the surprise Paul appears to have felt, in finding certain disciples at Ephesus, who though they had been baptized, were yet unacquainted with these communications. "Into what then," he asks, "were ye baptized?" and upon being informed "into John's baptism," the difficulty vanished.

Since the baptism of the Holy Ghost, or the copious effusion of spiritual influences, in which primitive Christians were, so to speak, immersed, was appointed to follow the sacramental use of water, under the christian economy, while the same corporeal action performed by John was a naked ceremony, not accompanied by any such effects, this difference betwixt them is sufficient to account for their being *contrasted* in scripture, and ought ever to have prevented their being confounded, as one and the same institute.

5. The case of the disciples at Ephesus, to which we have just adverted, affords a demonstrative proof of the position for which we are contending; for if John's baptism was the same with our Lord's, upon what principle could St. Paul proceed, in administering the latter to such as had already received the former. As I am aware that some have attempted to deny so plain a fact, I shall beg leave to quote the whole passage, which, I am persuaded, will leave no doubt on the mind of an impartial reader:—"It came to pass, while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passing through the upper coasts, came to Ephesus, and finding certain disciples, said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? but they replied, we have not even heard that there is an Holy Ghost. He

said unto them, into what then were ye baptized? they said, into John's baptism. Paul replied, John indeed baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him who was to come, that is on Jesus Christ. And when they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus; and when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came upon them, and they spake with tongues and prophesied." I am conscious that there are not wanting some who contend, that the fifth verse* is to be interpreted as the language of St. Paul, affirming that at the command of John, the people were baptized in the name of Jesus. But not to repeat what has already been advanced to shew that this is contrary to fact (for who, I might ask, were the people, who at his instigation were baptized in that name, or what traces are in the evangelical history of such a practice, during the period of his ministry?) not to insist further on this, it is obvious that this interpretation of the passage contradicts itself: for if John told the people that they were to believe on him who *was* to come, this was equivalent to declaring that he had not yet manifested himself; while the baptizing in his name as an existing individual, would have been to affirm the contrary. Besides we must remark, that the persons on whom St. Paul is asserted to have laid his hands, were unquestionably the identical persons who are affirmed in the preceding verse to have been baptized; for there is no other antecedent, so that if the meaning of the passage be what some contend for, the sacred historian must be supposed to assert that he laid his hands, not on the twelve disciples at Ephesus, but on John's converts in general, that the Holy Ghost came upon them, and that they spake with tongues and prophesied, which is ineffably absurd.

Either this must be supposed, or the words which in their original structure are most closely combined, must be conceived to consist of two parts, the first relating to John's converts in general, the second to the twelve disciples at Ephesus; and the relative pronoun expressive of the latter description of persons, instead of being conjoined to the preceding clause, must be referred to an

* "When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus."—*Acts* xix. 5.

antecedent, removed at the distance of three verses. In the whole compass of theological controversy, it would be difficult to assign a stronger instance of the force of prejudice in obscuring a plain matter of fact; nor is it easy to conjecture what could be the temptation to do such violence to the language of scripture, and to every principle of sober criticism, unless it were the horrour which certain divines have conceived, against every thing which bore the shadow of countenancing anabaptistical errour. The ancient commentators appear to have felt no such apprehensions, but to have followed without scruple the natural import of the passage.*

6. Independently of this decisive fact, whoever considers the extreme popularity of John, and the multitude of all descriptions who flocked to his baptism, will find it

* The intelligent reader will not be displeased to see the opinion of St. Austin on this point. It is almost unnecessary to say that it is decisively in our favour; nor does it appear that any of the Fathers entertained a doubt on the subject. In consulting the opinion of those who contended that such as were reclaimed from heresy ought to be rebaptized, he represents them as arguing, that if the converts of John required to be rebaptized, much more those who were converted from heresy. Since they who had the baptism of John were commanded by Paul to be baptized, not having the baptism of Christ, why do you extol the merit of John, and reprobate the misery of hereticks. "I concede to you," says St. Austin, "the misery of hereticks: but hereticks give the baptism of Christ, which John did not give."

The comment of Chrysostom, on the passage under consideration, is equally decisive. "He (Paul) did not say to them that the baptism of John was nothing, but that it was incomplete; nor does he say this simply, or without having a further purpose in view, but that he might teach and persuade them to be baptized in the name of Jesus, which they were, and received the Holy Ghost, by the laying on of Paul's hands." In the course of his exposition, he solves the difficulty attending the supposition of disciples at Ephesus, a place so remote from Judæa, having received baptism from John. "Perhaps," says he, "they were then on a journey, and went out, and were baptized." But even when they were baptized, they knew not Jesus. Nor does he ask them, do ye believe on Jesus, but have ye received the Holy Ghost? He knew that they had not received it, but is desirous of speaking to them, that on learning that they were destitute of it, they might be induced to seek it. A little afterwards he adds, "Well did he (Paul) denominate the baptism of John, the baptism of repentance, and not of remission; instructing and persuading them that it was destitute of that advantage: but the effect of that which was given afterwards, was remission."—*Homily in loco, Vol.* 4. *Etonæ.*—I am aware that very learned men have doubted the authenticity of Chrysostom's Commentary on the Acts, on account of the supposed inferiority of it to his other expository works. But without having recourse to so violent a supposition, its inferiority, should it be admitted, may be easily accounted for by the negligence, ignorance, or inattention of his amanuensis; supposing (which is not improbable) that his discourses were taken from his lips. From the time he was sixty years of age, he permitted his discourses to be taken down in short-hand, just as he delivered them.—*Euseb. Lib.* 6, *c.* 26.

difficult to believe, that there were not many in the same situation with these twelve disciples. The annunciation of the speedy appearance of their Messiah was the most welcome of all intelligence to the Jewish people, and did not fail for a time to produce prodigious effects.

The reader is requested to notice the terms employed to describe the effects of John's ministry, and compare them with the language of the historian, in depicting the most prosperous state of the church. "Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judæa, and all the coast round about Jordan, and were baptized in Jordan, confessing their sins." Where is such language employed to represent the success of the Apostles? *Their* converts are *numerically* stated, and at some distance from our Lord's ascension, appear to have amounted to about five thousand, while a great majority of the nation continued impenitent and incredulous. We read of no party formed against the Son of Zechariah, no persecution raised against his followers; and such was the reverence in which he continued to be held after his death, that the scribes and pharisees, those determined enemies to the gospel, dared not avow their disbelief of his mission, because all the people considered him as a prophet. The historian Josephus, who is generally supposed by the learned to have made no mention of our Saviour, bears decisive testimony to his merits, and imputes the misfortunes of Herod to the guilt he contracted by putting him to death.*

From these considerations, I infer, that if we suppose the converts made by the Apostles to have been universally baptized, on their admission into the church, (a fact not doubted by our opponents,) multitudes of them must have been in the same situation with the disciples at Ephesus. How is it possible it should have been otherwise? When the number of his converts were so prodigious, when the submission to his institute appears to have been almost national, when of so small a number as twelve, two at least of the Apostles were of his disciples, who can doubt for a moment, that some at least of the multitudes who were converted on or after the day of

* Antiq. Jud. Lib. 8. Colon. 1691.

Pentecost, consisted of such as had previously submitted to the baptism of John? Is it possible that the ministry of the forerunner, and of the Apostles of our Lord, should both have been productive of such great effects among the same people, at the distance of a few years, without operating in a single instance in the same direction, and upon the same persons? Amongst the converts at the day of Pentecost, and at subsequent periods, there must have been no inconsiderable number who had for a time been sufficiently awakened by the ministry of John to comply with this ordinance; yet it is evident from the narrative in the Acts, as well as admitted by our opponents, that Peter enjoined on them all, without exception, the duty of being immersed in the name of Christ. That such a description of persons should need to be converted by the Apostles, will easily be conceived, if we allow ourselves to reflect on the circumstances of the times. "He was a burning and a shining light," said our Lord, speaking of his forerunner, "and ye were willing for a time to rejoice in his light." This implies that their attachment was transient, their repentance superficial, and that the greater part of such as appeared for awhile most determined to press into the kingdom of God, afterwards sunk into a state of apathy. The singular spectacle of a prophet arising, after a long cessation of prophetical gifts, his severe sanctity, his bold and alarming address, coinciding with the general expectation of the Messiah, made a powerful impression on the spirits of men, and disposed them to pay a profound attention to his ministry; and from their attachment to every thing ritual and ceremonial, they would feel no hesitation in submitting to the ceremony he enjoined. But when the kingdom which they eagerly anticipated, appeared to be altogether of a spiritual nature, divested of secular pomp and grandeur, when the sublimer mysteries of the gospel began to be unfolded, and the necessity inculcated of eating the flesh, and drinking the blood, of the Son of Man, the people were offended, and even of the professed disciples of our Lord, many walked no more with him. A general declension succeeded, so that of the multitudes who once appeared to be much moved by his ministry, and that of his forerunner, the number which persevered was so inconsiderable,

that all that could be mustered to witness his resurrection amounted to little more than five hundred,* a number which may be considered as constituting the whole body of the church, till the day of Pentecost.

The parable of the house forsaken for a time by an evil spirit, swept and garnished, to which he returned with seven more wicked than himself, it is generally admitted, was designed to represent this temporary reformation of the Jewish nation, together with its subsequent apostacy. The day of Pentecost changed the scene, the power of the ascended Saviour began to be developed; and three thousand were converted at one time. Nor did it cease here; for soon after, we are informed of a great multitude of priests who became obedient to the faith; and at a subsequent period St. James reminds the Apostle of the Gentiles of many myriads of converted Jews, all zealous for the law.

Let me ask again, is it possible to suppose that none of these myriads consisted of such as had been baptized by John? Were they all, without exception, of that impious class which uniformly held his mission in contempt? It is impossible to suppose it; it is contradicted by the express testimony of scripture, which affirms two of the Apostles to have been his disciples and companions.† But if such as professed their faith in Christ, under the ministry of the Apostles, were baptized on that profession, without any consideration of their having been previously immersed by John, or not, what stronger proof can be desired, that the institutes in question were totally distinct. Were we satisfied with an *argumentum ad hominem*, with the sort of proof sufficient to silence our opponents, here the matter might safely rest. But independent of their concession, I must add, that it is manifest from the whole tenour of the Acts, that the baptismal rite was universally administered to the converts to Christianity subsequent to the day of Pentecost. Peter said unto them, "Repent and be baptized *every one* of you:" it is added almost immediately, "Then they that gladly received his words were baptized."

It will possibly be asked, if the rite which the forerunner of our Lord administered is not to be considered as a

* 1 Corinthians xv. 6. † John i. 35, 36, 37.

christian institute, to what dispensation are we to assign it, since it is manifestly no part of the economy of Moses. We reply, that it was the symbol of a peculiar dispensation, which was neither entirely legal or evangelical, but occupied an intermediate station, possessing something of the character and attributes of both; a kind of twilight, equally removed from the obscurity of the first, and the splendour of the last and perfect economy of religion. *The law and the prophets were till John;* his mission constituted a distinct era, and placed the nation to which he was sent, in circumstances materially different from their preceding or subsequent state. It was the era of preparation; it was a voice which, breaking through a long silence, announced the immediate approach of the *desire of all nations, the messenger of the covenant, in whom they delighted.* In announcing this event as at hand, and establishing a rite unknown to the law, expressive of that purity of heart, and reformation of life, which were the only suitable preparations for his reception, he stood alone, equally severed from the choir of the prophets, and the company of the Apostles; and the light which he emitted, though it greatly surpassed every preceding illumination, was of short duration, being soon eclipsed and extinguished by that ineffable effulgence, before which nothing can retain its splendour.

The wisdom of God in the arrangement of successive dispensations, seems averse to sudden and violent innovations, rarely introducing new rites, without incorporating something of the old. As by the introduction of the Mosaick, the simple ritual of the patriarchal dispensation was not so properly abolished, as amplified and extended into a regular system of prefigurations of *good things to come,* in which the worship by sacrifices, and the distinction of animals into clean and unclean, re-appeared under a new form; so the era of immediate preparation was distinguished by a ceremony not entirely new, but derived from the purifications of the law, applied to a special purpose.* Our Lord incorporated the same rite into his religion, newly modified, and adapted to the peculiar views and objects of the christian economy, in conjunction with

* The principal part of these consisted in bathing the body in water.

another positive institution, the rudiments of which are perceptible in the passover. It seemed suitable to his wisdom, by such gentle gradations to conduct his church from an infantine state, to a state of maturity and perfection.

Before I dismiss this part of the subject, which has perhaps already detained the reader too long, I must beg leave to hazard one conjecture. Since it is manifest that the baptism of John did not supersede the christian ordinance, they being perfectly distinct, it is natural to inquire, who baptized the Apostles, and the hundred and twenty disciples assembled with them at the day of Pentecost? My deliberate opinion is, that in the christian sense of the term, they were not baptized at all. From the total silence of scripture, and from other circumstances which might be adduced, it is difficult to suppose they submitted to that rite after our Saviour's resurrection; and previous to it, it has been sufficiently proved, that it was not in force. It is almost certain, that some, probably most of them, had been baptized by John, but for reasons which have been already amply assigned, this will not account for their not submitting to the christian ordinance. The true account seems to be, that the precept of baptism had no *retrospective* bearing; and that, consequently, its obligation extended only to such as were converted to Christianity subsequently to the time of its promulgation. Such as had professed their faith in Christ from the period of his first manifestation, could not, without palpable incongruity, recommence that profession, which would have been to cancel and annul their former religious pretensions. With what propriety could the Apostles of the Lord, *who had continued with him in his temptations*, place themselves on a level with that multitude, which however penitent at present, had recently demanded his blood with clamorous importunity? not to insist that they had already received the baptism of the Holy Ghost, of which the sacramental use of water was but a figure. They were not converted to the christian religion subsequently to their Lord's resurrection, nor did the avowal of their attachment to the Messiah, commence from that period, and therefore, they were not comprehended under the baptismal law, which was propounded for the regulation of the conduct of persons in essentially different circumstances.

When St. Paul says, *as many* of us as were baptized into Christ, have put on Christ, his language seems to intimate, that there was a class of Christians, to whom this argument did not apply.*

Having proved, I trust, to the satisfaction of the candid reader, that baptism, considered as a christian institution, had no existence during the personal ministry of our Saviour, the plea of our opponents, founded on the supposed *priority* of that ordinance to the Lord's supper, is completely overruled; whatever weight it might possess, supposing it were valid, must be wholly transferred to the opposite side, and it must be acknowledged, either that they have reasoned inconclusively, or have produced a demonstration in our favour. It now appears that the original communicants at the Lord's table, at the time they partook of it, were with respect to the christian baptism, precisely in the same situation with the persons they exclude.

SECTION II.

The argument for strict communion, from the order of words in the apostolick commission considered.

The commission which the Apostles received after our Lord's resurrection, was in the following words:—"All power is given to me in heaven and on earth. Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe whatsoever I have commanded you." From baptism being mentioned *first* after teaching, it is urged that it ought invariably to be administered immediately after effectual instruction is imparted, and consequently before an approach to the Lord's table. Whence it is concluded that to communicate with such as are unbaptized, is a violation of divine order.†

* Romans vi. 3.

† "Teach," says Mr. Booth, "is the high commission, and such the express command of him who is *Lord of all*, when addressing those who are called to preach his word, and administer his institutions. Hence, it is manifest, the commission and command are first of all to teach; what then?—to baptize, or to administer the Lord's supper? I leave common sense to

It may assist the reader to form a judgment of the force of the argument adduced on this occasion, if we reduce it to the following syllogism :—

The persons who are to be taught to observe all things given in charge to the Apostle, are the baptized alone.

But the Lord's supper is one of these things.

Therefore, the ordinance of the Lord's supper, ought to be enjoined on the baptized alone.

Here it is obvious, that the conclusion rests entirely upon this principle, that *nothing* which the Apostles were commissioned to enjoin on believers, is to be recommended to the attention of persons not baptized; since, as far as this argument is concerned, the observation of the Lord's supper is supposed not to belong to them, merely because it forms a part of those precepts. It is obvious, if the reasoning of our opponents be valid, it militates irresistibly against the inculcation of every branch of christian duty, on persons who in their judgment have not partaken of the baptismal sacrament: it excludes them not merely from the Lord's supper, but from every species of instruction appropriate to Christians; nor can they exhort Pædobaptists to walk worthy of their high calling, to adorn their christian profession, to cultivate brotherly love, or to the performance of any duty resulting from their actual relation to Christ, without a palpable violation of their own principles. In all such instances, they would be teaching them to observe injunctions which Christ gave in charge to the Apostles for the regulation of christian conduct, while they deem it necessary to repel them from the sacrament, merely on account of its forming a part of those injunctions. Nor can they avoid the force of this

judge, and being persuaded that she will give her verdict in my favour, I will venture to add, a limited commission implies a prohibition of such things as are not contained in it; and positive laws imply their *negative*.

For instance, when God commanded Abraham to circumcise all his males, he readily concluded that neither circumcision, nor any rite of a similar nature, was to be administered to his females. And as our brethren themselves maintain, when Christ commanded *believers* should be baptized, without mentioning any others, he tacitly prohibited that ordinance from being administered to *infants*; so by parity of reason, if the same sovereign Lord commanded that believers should be baptized—baptized *immediately* after they made a profession of faith, then he must intend that the administration of baptism should be prior to a reception of the Lord's supper, and, consequently, tacitly prohibits every unbaptized person having communion at his table."—*Booth's Apology, page* 34.

reasoning, by objecting that though it may be their duty to enjoin on unbaptized believers some parts of the mind of Christ respecting the conduct of his mystical members, it will not follow that they are to be admitted to the Lord's table; and that their meaning is, that it is only subsequently to baptism, that *all things* ought to be enforced on the consciences of Christians. For if it be once admitted that the clause on which so much stress is laid, is not to be interpreted so as absolutely to exclude unbaptized Christians from the *whole* of its import, to what purpose is it alleged against their admission to the eucharist? or how does it appear that this may not be one of the parts in which they are comprehended?

When the advocates for strict communion remind us of the order in which the two positive institutions of Christianity are enjoined, they appear to assume it for granted, that we are desirous of inverting that order, and that we are contending for the celebration of the eucharist previous to baptism, in the case of a clear comprehension of the nature and obligation of each. We plead for nothing of the kind. Supposing a convert to Christianity, convinced of the ordinance of baptism, in the light in which we contemplate it, we should urge his obligation to comply with it, previous to his reception of the sacrament, with as little hesitation as the most rigid of our opponents; nor should we be more disposed than themselves to countenance a neglect of known duty, or a wanton inversion of the order of christian appointments. Whether in such circumstances the attention of a candidate for christian communion should first be directed to baptism, is not the question at issue; but what conduct ought to be maintained towards sincere Christians, who after serious examination, profess their conviction of being baptized already, or who in any manner whatever, are withheld by motives purely conscientious, from complying with what we conceive to be a christian ordinance. To justify the exclusion of such from the Lord's table, it is not sufficient to allege the prescribed order of the institutions; it is necessary also to evince such a *dependance* of one upon the other, that a neglect of the first from involuntary mistake, annuls the obligation of the second. Let this dependance be once clearly pointed out, and we give up the cause.

It has been asserted, indeed, with much confidence, that we have the same authority for confining our communion to baptized persons, as the ancient Jews for admitting none but such as had been circumcised, to the passover: a simple recital, however, of the words of the law, with respect to that ancient rite, will be sufficient to demonstrate the contrary: "When a stranger shall sojourn with thee, and will keep his passover to the Lord, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come and keep it, and he shall be as one that is born in the land; for no *uncircumcised* person shall eat thereof." But where, let me ask, is it asserted in the New Testament, that no unbaptized person shall partake of the eucharist?* So far from this, it has been, I trust, satisfactorily shewn, that of the original communicants at its first institution, not one was thus qualified.

I presume it will be acknowledged, that the Jewish law was so clear and express in insisting on circumcision as a necessary preparation for partaking of the paschal lamb that none could mistake it, or approach that feast in an uncircumcised state, without being guilty of wilful impiety; and if it is intended to insinuate the same charge against Pædobaptists, let it be alleged without disguise, that it may be fairly met and refuted. But if it be acknowledged, that nothing but such involuntary mistakes, such unintentional errours, as are incident to some of the wisest and best of men, are imputable in the present instance, we are at a loss to conceive upon what principle they are compared to wilful prevarication and rebellion. The degree of blame which attaches to the conduct of those who mistake the will of Christ with respect to the sacramental use of water, we shall not pretend to determine; but we feel no hesitation in affirming, that the practice of comparing it to a presumptuous violation and contempt of divine law, is equally repugnant to the dictates of propriety and of candour. Among the innumerable descendants of Abraham, it is impossible to find one since their departure from Egypt, who has doubted of the

* "Was it the duty, think you, of an ancient Israelite to worship at the sanctuary, or to partake of the paschal feast, before he was circumcised? Or was it the duty of the Jewish priests to burn incense in the holy place, before they offered the morning or evening service? The appointments of God must be administered in his own way, and in that order which he has fixed."—*Booth's Apology, page* 143.

obligation of circumcision, of the proper subjects of that rite, or of its being an indispensable prerequisite to the privileges of the Mosaick covenant. Among Christians, on the contrary, of unexceptionable character and exalted piety, it cannot be denied that the subject, the mode, and the perpetuity of baptism, have each supplied occasion for controversy; which can only be ascribed to the minute particularity with which the ceremonies of the law were enjoined, compared to the concise brevity which characterizes the history of evangelical institutes. We are far, however, from insinuating a doubt on the obligation of believers to submit to the ordinance of baptism, or of its being exclusively appropriated to such; but we affirm, that in no part of scripture is it inculcated as a *preparative to the Lord's supper*, and that this view of it is a mere fiction of the imagination.

When duties are enjoined in a certain series, each of them on the authority in which they originate become obligatory; nor are we excused from performing those which stand later in the series, on account of our having, from misconception of their meaning, or from any other cause, omitted the first. To exemplify this by a familiar instance: It will be admitted, that the law of nature enforces the following duties, resulting from the relation of children to their parents: first, to yield implicit obedience in the state of nonage; next, in maturer age to pay respectful deference to their advice, and a prompt attention to their wants; lastly, after they are deceased, affectionately to cherish their memory, and defend their good name. None will deny that each of these branches of conduct is obligatory, and that this is the order in which they are recommended to our attention. But will it be contended, that he who has neglected the first, ought not to perform the second; or, that he who has failed in the second, ought to omit the third? To such an absurd pretence we should immediately reply that they are all *independently* obligatory, as respective dictates of the divine will; and that for him who has violated one of them, to urge his past delinquencies as an apology for the present, would only prove an aggravation of his guilt. It is true, that some duties are so situated, as parts or appendages of preceding ones, that their obligation may be said to

result from them; as for example, the duty of confessing Christ before men arises from the previous duty of believing on him, and that of joining a christian society presupposes the obligation of becoming a Christian. In such cases, however, as the connexion betwixt the respective branches of practice is founded on the nature of things, it is easily perceived, and rarely, if ever, the subject of controversy. In a series of positive precepts, this principle has no place; as they originate merely in arbitrary appointment, their mutual relation can only be the result of clear and express command, and as reason could never have discovered their obligation, so it is as little able to ascertain their intrinsick connexion and dependance, which wherever it subsists, must be the effect of the same positive prescription which gave them birth. It cannot be pretended, that an unbaptized believer is intrinsically disqualified for a suitable attendance at the Lord's table, or that it is so essentially connected with baptism, as to render the act of communion, in itself, absurd or improper. The communion has no retrospective reference to baptism, nor is baptism an anticipation of communion. Enjoined at different times, and appointed for different purposes, they are capable, without the least inconvenience, of being contemplated apart; and on no occasion are they mentioned in such a connexion, as to imply, much less to assert, that the one is enjoined *with a view* to the other. Such a connexion, we acknowledge, subsisted betwixt the rites of circumcision and the passover; and all we demand of the advocates of strict communion is, that instead of amusing us with fanciful analogies drawn from an antiquated law, they would point us to some clause in the New Testament which asserts a similar relation betwixt baptism and the Lord's supper. But here, where the very hinge of the controversy turns, the scriptures are silent. They direct us to be baptized, and they direct us to commemorate the Saviour's death, but not a syllable do they utter to inform us of the inseparable connexion betwixt these two ordinances. This deficiency is ill supplied by fervid declamation on the perspicuity of our Lord's commission, and the inexcusable inattention or prejudice which has led to a misconception of its meaning; for let the persons whom these charges

may concern be as guilty as they may, since they are still acknowledged to be Christians, the question returns, why are they debarred from the communion of saints, and while entitled to all other spiritual privileges, supposed to be incapacitated from partaking of the symbols of a crucified Saviour. How came the deteriorating effects of their errour respecting baptism, to affect them but in one point, that of their eligibility as candidates for communion, without spreading farther? That it just amounts to a forfeiture of this privilege, and of no other, is a conclusion to which, as it is certain it cannot be established by reason, we ask to be conducted by revelation; and we intreat our opponents for information on that head again and again, but intreat in vain.

Were we to judge from the ardent attachment which the abettors of strict communion, on all occasions, profess to the positive institutes of the gospel, we should suppose, that the object of their efforts was to raise them to their just estimation, and to rescue them from desuetude and neglect. We should conjecture that they arose from a solicitude to revive certain practices which had prevailed in the purest ages of the church, but were afterwards laid aside, just as the ordinance of preaching was, during the triumph of the papacy, almost consigned to oblivion; and that the consequence of complying with their suggestions, would be a more complete exhibition of Christianity in all its parts. But their zeal operates in quite a contrary direction. The success of their scheme tends not to extend the practice of baptism, no, not in a single instance, but merely to exclude the Lord's supper. Leaving the former appointment unaltered and untouched, it merely proposes to abolish the latter; and as far as it is practicable, to lay the christian world under an interdict. The real state of the case is as follows:—On the subject of baptism, and particularly whether it is applicable to infants, opinions are divided, and the majority have come, as we conceive, to an erroneous conclusion. How do they propose to remedy this evil? By throwing all manner of obstacles in the way of an approach to the Lord's table, and as far as their power extends, rendering it impracticable, by clogging it with a condition at which conscience revolts. They propose to punish men for the involuntary neglect

of one ordinance, by compelling them to abandon the other; and because they are uneasy at perceiving them perform but one half of their duty, oblige them, as far as lies in their power, to omit the whole. I must confess, I feel no partiality for those violent remedies, which under the pretence of reforming, destroy; or for that passion for order which would rather witness the entire desolation of the sanctuary, than a defalcation of its rites; and in spite of all the efforts of sophistry, I must be permitted to believe, that our Lord's express injunction on his followers, "Do this in remembrance of me," is a better reason for the celebration of the communion than can be adduced for its neglect.

SECTION III.

The argument from apostolical precedent, and from the different significations of the two institutions, considered.

In vindication of their practice, our opponents are wont to urge the order of administration in the primitive and apostolick practice. They remind us that the members of the primitive church were universally baptized; that if we acknowledge its constitution in that respect to be expressive of the mind of Christ, we are bound to follow that precedent, and that to deviate from it in this particular, is virtually to impeach either the wisdom of our Lord, or the fidelity of his Apostles.*

With respect to the *universality* of the practice of christian baptism, having already stated our views, it is not necessary to repeat what has already been advanced, or to recapitulate the reasons on which we found our opin-

* "The order of administration," says Mr. Booth, "in the primitive and apostolick practice, now demands our notice. That the Apostles, when endued with power from on high, understood our Lord in the sense for which we plead, and practised accordingly, is quite evident. Then they that gladly received his word were, what? admitted to the Lord's table? No, but baptized:—*And the same day there were added to them about three thousand souls; and they continued stedfast in the Apostle's doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayer.* If our brethren do not look upon the apostolick precedent as expressive of the mind of Christ, and as a pattern for future imitation, to the end of the world, they must consider the Apostles as either ignorant of our Lord's will, or as unfaithful in the performance of it."—*Booth's Apology, page* 47, 48.

ion, that it was not extended to such as were converted previous to our Lord's resurrection. Subsequently to that period, we admit, without hesitation, that the converts to the christian faith submitted to that ordinance, prior to their reception into the christian church. As little are we disposed to deny, that it is at present the duty of the sincere believer to follow their example, and that, supposing him to be clearly convinced of the nature and import of baptism, he would be guilty of a criminal irregularity who neglected to attend to it, previous to his entering into christian fellowship. On the obligation of both the positive rites enjoined in the New Testament, and the prior claim of baptism to the attention of such as are properly enlightened on the subject, we have no dispute. All we contend for is, that they do not so depend one upon the other, that the conscientious omission of the first, forfeits the privilege, or cancels the duty, of observing the second; nor are we able to perceive, that what in the present instance is styled apostolick precedent, at all decides the question. To attempt to determine under what circumstances the highest precedent possesses the form of law, involves a difficult and delicate inquiry; for while it is acknowledged that much deference is due to primitive example, there were certain usages in apostolical times, which few would attempt to revive. There is one general rule, however, applicable to the subject, which is, that no matter of fact is entitled to be considered as an authoritative precedent, which *necessarily* arose out of existing circumstances, so that in the then present state of things, it could not fail to have occurred. The foundation of this rule is obvious. Nothing is of the nature of law, but what emanates from the will of the legislator; but when a particular fact, recorded in an historical narration, is so situated, that the contrary would have appeared incongruous or absurd; in other words, when it could not fail to be the result of previous occurrences, such a fact is destitute of the essential characteristick of a law; it has no apparent dependance upon a superiour will.

Hence many practices occur in the history of the apostolick transactions, which it is universally admitted we are not obliged to imitate. It is an unquestionable fact, that

the eucharist was first celebrated with unleavened bread, on the evening, in an upper room, and to the Jews only; but as we distinctly perceive, that these particulars originated in the peculiar circumstances of the time, we are far from considering them as binding. On the same principle we account for the members of the primitive church consisting only of such as were baptized, without erecting that circumstance into an invariable rule of action. When we recollect, that no errour or mistake subsisted, or could subsist, among Christians at that period, we are compelled to regard it as the necessary consequence of the state of opinions then prevalent. While all the faithful concurred in their interpretation of the law which enjoins it, how is it possible to suppose it neglected? or whence could rebaptized communicants have been drawn? Is this circumstance, to which so much importance is attached, of such a nature, that no account can be given of it, but upon the principle of our opponents? or is it the necessary consequence of the then actual situation of the church? If the latter be admitted, it ceases for the reason already alleged, to be a precedent, or a rule for the direction of future times.

We are willing to go a step further, and to acknowledge that he who, convinced of the divine origin of Christianity by the ministry of the Apostles, had refused to be baptized, would at that period have been justly debarred from receiving the sacramental elements. While the Apostles were yet living, and daily exemplifying the import of their commission before the eyes of the people, it would have been impossible to pretend ignorance, nor could that sincerity fail to be suspected, which was not accompanied with an implicit submission to their authority.

"He that receiveth you," said our Lord, "receiveth me; he that rejecteth you, rejecteth me." Agreeably to which, we find that the disciple whom Jesus loved, did not scruple to use the following language:—"By this ye know the spirit of truth and the spirit of errour; he that is of God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us." Such a conduct was perfectly proper. As there can be but two guides in religion, reason and authority, and every man must form his belief, either by following the light of his own mind, or the information and instruction he derives from others, so it is equally evident

it is only by the last of these methods, that the benefit of a new revelation can be diffused. Either we must suppose an infinite multitude of miracles performed on the minds of individuals to convey the knowledge of supernatural truths, or that one or more are thus preternaturally enlightened, and invested with a commission to speak in the name of God to others; endowed at the same time with such peculiar powers, such a control over nature, or such a foresight of future contingencies, as shall be sufficient to accredit and establish his mission.

He who refuses to submit to the guidance of persons thus attested and accredited, must be considered as virtually renouncing the revelation imparted, and as the necessary consequence, forfeiting his interest in its blessings. On these grounds, it is not difficult to perceive, that a primitive convert, or rather pretended convert, who without doubting, that baptism, in the way in which we practise it, formed a part of the apostolick commission, had refused compliance, would have been deemed unworthy christian communion, not on account of any specifick connexion betwixt the two ordinances, but on account of his evincing a spirit totally repugnant to the mind of Christ. By rejecting the only authority established upon earth for the direction of conscience, and the termination of doubts and controversies, he would, undoubtedly, have been repelled as a contumacious schismatick. But what imaginable resemblance is there betwixt such a mode of procedure, and the conduct of our Pædobaptist brethren, who oppose no legitimate authority, impeach no part of the apostolick testimony, but mistaking (in our judgment at least) its import in one particular, decline a practice, which many of them would be the first to comply with, were they once convinced it was the dictate of duty, and the will of heaven. In the one case, we perceive open rebellion, in the other, involuntary errour: in the one, the pride which opposes itself to the dictates of inspired wisdom, in the other, a specimen (an humbling one it is true) of that infirmity, in consequence of which, we all see but in part, and know but in part. Since whatever degree of prejudice or inattention we may be disposed to impute to the abettors of infant sprinkling, the principles on which they proceed are essentially different from those

which could alone have occasioned the introduction of that practice in apostolick times, we are at a loss to conceive the propriety of classing them together, or of animadverting upon them with equal severity. The Apostles would have repelled from their communion men, who while they professed to be followers of Christ, refused submission to his inspired messengers; in other words, they would have rejected some of the worst of men: therefore, say our opponents, we feel ourselves justified in excluding multitudes whom we acknowledge to be the best. I am at a loss, whether most to admire the logick, the equity, or the modesty of such a conclusion.

Besides, this reasoning from precedent is of so flexible a nature, that it may with equal ease be employed in a contrary direction, and be turned to the annoyance of our opponents. As it is an acknowledged fact, that in primitive times, all the faithful were admitted to an equality of participation in every christian privilege; to repel the great majority of them on account of an errour, acknowledged not to be fundamental, is at once, a wide departure from the apostolick example, and a palpable contradiction to the very words employed in its first institution; "drink ye all of it; do this in remembrance of me:" words addressed, as has already been proved, to persons who had not received christian baptism. If it be replied, that though all Christians originally communicated, yet from the period of the Pentecost, at least, they were all previously initiated by immersion, the inquiry returns, were they baptized on account of the necessary connexion of that appointment with the eucharist, or purely in deference to the apostolick injunction? To assert the former, would be palpably begging the question; and if the latter is affirmed, we reply, that as they practised as they did, in deference to the will of God, so our Pædobaptist brethren, in declining the practice which we adopt, regulate their conduct by the same principle.

The shew of conformity to apostolick precedent is with the advocates of strict communion, and nothing more; the substance and reality are with us. Their conformity is to the letter, ours to the spirit; theirs, circumstantial and incidental; ours, radical and essential. In withholding the signs from those who are in possession of the thing signi-

fied, in refusing to communicate the symbols of the great sacrifice, to those who are equally with themselves sprinkled by its blood and sharers of its efficacy, in dividing the regenerate into two classes, believers and communicants, and confining the Church to the narrow limits of a sect, they have violated more maxims of antiquity, and receded further from the example of the Apostles, than any class of Christians on record.

We live in a mutable world, and the diversity of sentiment, which has arisen in the christian church on the subject of baptism, has placed things in a new situation, and has given birth to a case which can be determined only by an appeal to the general principles of the gospel, and to those injunctions in particular, which are designed to regulate the conduct of Christians, whose judgments in points of secondary moment differ. These we shall have occasion to discuss in another part of this treatise, where it will, we trust, be satisfactorily shewn, that we are furnished with a clue fully sufficient for our guidance: and when we consider the impossibility of comprehending in any code whatever, every possible combination of future occurrences and events, we shall perceive the necessity of having recourse to those large and comprehensive maxims, which the prospective wisdom of the Father of lights, and the Author of revelation, has abundantly supplied.

Were it not, that more are capable of numbering arguments, than of weighing them, the mention of the following might be omitted. The signification of the two positive ordinances of the gospel is urged in proof of the necessity of baptism preceding the Lord's supper. The first, we are reminded by our opponents, is styled by theologians, the sacrament of *regeneration*, or of initiation; the second, the sacrament of nutrition.* To argue from metaphors is rarely a conclusive mode of reasoning, but if it were, the regenerate state of our Pædobaptist breth-

* "In submitting to baptism," says Mr. Booth, "we have an emblem of our union and communion with Jesus Christ, as our great representative, in his death, burial, and resurrection. And as in baptism, we profess to have renewed spiritual life; so in communicating at the Lord's table, we have the emblem of that heavenly food by which we live, by which we grow, and by virtue of which we hope to live for ever. Hence, theological writers have often called baptism the sacrament of *regeneration*, or of initiation, and the Lord's supper, the sacrament of *nutrition*."—*Booth's Apology.*

ren would surely afford a much better reason for admitting them to the *sacrament of nutrition*, than their misconception of a particular command for prohibiting them, unless we choose to affirm, that the shadow is of more importance than the substance, or that the sacrament of nutrition is not intended to nourish.

Their actual possession of spiritual life, in consequence of their union to the head of the Church, necessarily implies a title to every christian privilege, by which such a life is cherished and maintained, unless there were an express prohibition to the contrary; nor is it to be doubted, that the acknowledgment of Pædobaptists, as Christians, implies a competence to enter into the full import of the rites commemorative of our Lord's death and passion. To consider the Lord's supper, however, as a mere commemoration of that event, is to entertain a very inadequate view of it. If we credit St. Paul, it is also a *federal rite*, in which, in token of our reconciliation with God, we eat and drink in his presence: it is a feast upon a sacrifice, by which we become partakers at the altar, not less really, though in a manner more elevated and spiritual, than those who, under the ancient economy, presented their offerings in the temple. In this ordinance, the cup is a spiritual participation of the blood, the bread of the body of the crucified Saviour:* and as our Pædobaptist brethren are allowed to be in covenant with God, their title to every federal rite follows of course, unless it is barred by some clear unequivocal declaration of scripture; instead of which we meet with nothing on the opposite side, but precarious conjectures, and remote analogies.

Our opponents are extremely fond of representing baptism under the New Testament, as essential as circumcision under the old, inferring from thence, that no unbaptized person is admissible to the eucharist, for the same reason that none who was not circumcised, was permitted to partake of the paschal feast. But besides that this is to reason from analogy, a practice against which, when applied to the discussion of positive institutes, they on other occasions earnestly protest, the analogy fails in the most essential points. Circumcision is expressly stated as a necessary condition of admission to the passover: a

* 1 Corinthians xi. 16.

similar statement respecting baptism will decide the controversy. The neglect of circumcision, which could proceed from nothing but presumptuous impiety, incurred the sentence of *excision; that soul shall be cut off from the people.* Whatever may be meant besides by that commination, it will not be doubted, that it included the entire forfeiture of the advantages of that peculiar covenant, which God was pleased to establish with the Israelitish people; and the exclusion from the paschal feast, as well as from the other sacrifices, was the necessary appendage of that forfeiture.

The most violent Baptist will not presume to insinuate, that the neglect of baptism, from a misconception of its nature, is exposed to a similar penalty. It is evident, from the history of the Old Testament, that an Israelite became disqualified for sharing in whatever privileges distinguished that nation, only in consequence of such a species of criminality as cut him off from the covenant. An interest in that covenant, (the particular nature of which it is not necessary to insist upon) and a free access to all the privileges and institutions of the Jewish people, were inseparable, so that nothing would have appeared to an ancient Jew more absurd, than to disunite the covenant itself, from the federal rites by which it was ratified and confirmed. The invention of this ingenious paradox belongs exclusively to the abettors of strict communion, who in the same breath affirm, that Pædobaptists are entitled to all the blessings of the new and everlasting covenant, and forbidden to commemorate it: and scruple not to assert, that though interested as much as themselves in the great sacrifice, it would be presumption in them to approach the sacred symbols, which are appointed for no other purpose but to hold it forth. It is certainly with a very ill grace, that the champions of such monstrous and unparalleled positions, ridicule their opponents for inventing a new and eccentrick theology.*

* "The last century," says Mr. Booth, page 36, "was the grand era of improvement, of prodigious improvement, in light and liberty. In light, as well divine as philosophical, by the labours of a Bacon, a Boyle, and a Newton. In pretended theological knowledge, by those of a Jesse or a Bunyan. Did the former, by deep researches into the system of nature, surprise and instruct the world, by discoveries of which mankind has never before conceived? The latter, penetrating into the gospel system, amused mankind by casting new light on the positive institutions of Jesus Christ; and by placing

Before I dismiss this head, I must remark, that in insisting upon the prior claim which baptism possesses to the attention of a christian convert, the advocates of strict communion triumph without an opponent. We know of none who contend for the propriety of inverting the natural order of the christian sacraments, where they can both be attended to, that is, when the nature of each is clearly understood and confessed. To administer them under any other circumstances, it will be acknowledged, is impracticable. We administer baptism, let it be remembered, *in every instance* in which our opponents will allow it ought to be administered; and the only difference is, that we have fellowship, in another ordinance, with those members of the body of Christ, whom they reject. Let it once be demonstrated, that the obligation of commemorating the Saviour's death, is not sufficiently supported by his express injunction, but derives its force and validity from its inseparable connexion with a preceding sacrament, and we are prepared to abandon our practice, as a presumptuous innovation on the laws of Christ. Till then we shall not be much moved by the charge of claiming a dispensing power with which we are frequently accused—a power which I presume no Protestant ever dreamed of usurping, and the assumption of which implies such impiety as ought to render a Christian reluctant to urge such a charge.

To remind us of "the destruction of Nadab and Abihu by fire from Heaven, the breach that was made upon Uzzah, the stigma fixed, and the curses denounced upon Jerusalem, together with the fall and ruin of all mankind by our first father's disobedience to a positive command," is more calculated to inflame the passions, than to elicit truth, or conduct the controversy to a satisfactory issue. When the sole inquiry is, what *is* the law of Christ, and we are fully persuaded that our interpretation of it is more natural and reasonable than that of our opponents, it is not a little absurd, to charge us with assuming a claim of dispensing with its authority. We know that he com-

baptism among things of little importance in the christian religion, of which no ancient theologian ever dreamed—none we have reason to think, that ever loved the Lord Redeemer." A little after he adds, "the practical claim of dispensing power by Jesse and Bunyan, made way for the *inglorious* liberty of treating positive institutions in the house of God just as professors please."

manded his followers to be baptized; we know also, that he commanded them to shew forth his death till he came: but where shall we look for a tittle of his law, which forbids such as sincerely, though erroneously, believe themselves to have complied with the first, to attend to the last of these injunctions? Where is the scriptural authority for *resting* the obligation of the eucharist, not on the precept that enjoins it, but on the previous reception of baptism? As the scripture is totally silent on this point, we are not disposed to accept the officious assistance of our brethren in supplying its deficiency; and beg permission to remind them, that to add to the word of God, is equally criminal with taking away from it.

Do we neglect the administration of that rite to any class of persons, whose state of mind is such as would render it acceptable to God? Do we neglect to illustrate and enforce it in our publick ministrations? Are we accustomed to insinuate, that serious inquiry into the mind of Christ on this subject, is of little, or no importance? Are we found to decline its administration in any case whatever, in which our accusers would not equally decline it? Nothing of this can be alleged. Do they argue from the language of the original institute, from the examples of cripture, and the precedent of the early ages, that it is the duty of believers without exception, to be immersed in the name of Jesus? So do we. Are they disposed to look upon such as have neglected, whether from inattention or prejudice, to perform this duty, as *mistaken Christians?* We also consider them in the same light. In what respect then, are we guilty of dispensing with divine laws? Merely because we are incapable of perceiving, that an involuntary mistake on this subject, disqualifies for christian communion. But how extremely unjust to load us, on that account, with the charge of assuming a dispensing power, when the only ground on which we maintain our opinion, whether true or false, is our conviction that it is founded on a legitimate interpretation of the oracles of God. The dispute is not concerning their authority, but their meaning; and we dispense with baptism in no other sense, than that of denying it to be in all cases essential to communion; in which, whether we are mistaken or not, is a point open to controversy; but to be guilty first of a *mis-*

nomer in defining our sentiments, and afterwards to convert an odious and erroneous appellation into an argument, is the height of injustice.

With what propriety our practice is compared to that of the church of Rome, in confining the communion to one kind, the intelligent reader will be at no loss to perceive.* In that as in various other instances, that Church in order to raise the dignity of the priesthood, assumes a power of mutilating a divine ordinance. We are chargeable with no mutilation, nor presume in the smallest particular to innovate in the celebration of either sacraments; we merely refuse to acknowledge that dependance, one upon the other, on which the confidence of our opponents is so ill sustained by the silence of scripture.

We will close this part of the discussion by remarking, that there is a happy equivocation in the word *dispense*, which has contributed not a little to its introduction into the present controversy. It may either mean, that we do not insist upon baptism as an indispensable condition of communion, in which sense the charge is true, but nothing to the purpose, since it is a mere statement, in other words, of our actual practice. Or it may intend, that we knowingly and deliberately deviate from the injunctions of scripture; a serious accusation, which requires not to be asserted, but proved.

SECTION IV.

Our supposed opposition to the universal suffrages of the church considered.

In admitting to our communion those whom we esteem *unbaptized*, we are accused of a presumptuous departure from the sentiments of all parties and denominations

* "It must, I think, be acknowledged," says Mr. Booth, "even by our brethren themselves, that we have as good a warrant for omitting an essential branch of an ordinance, or to reverse the order in which the *constituent parts* of an ordinance were originally administered, as we have to lay aside a divine institution, or to change the order in which two different appointments were first fixed. And if so, were a reformed and converted Catholick, still retaining the popish errour of communion in *one kind* only, desirous of having fellowship with our brethren at the Lord's table; they must, if they would act consistently, on their present hypothesis, admit him to partake of the bread, though from a principle of conscience, he absolutely refused the wine in that sacred institution."—*Booth's Apology, page* 51.

throughout the christian world, who however they may have differed upon other subjects, have unanimously concurred in considering baptism as a necessary preliminary to communion.*

The first remark which occurs on this mode of reasoning is, that it is merely an *argumentum ad verecundiam*, an attempt to overawe by the weight of authority, without pretending to enter into the merits of the controversy. It assumes for its basis the impossibility of the universal prevalence of errour, which if it be once admitted, all hopes of extending the boundaries of knowledge must be relinquished. My next observation is, that it comes with peculiar infelicity from the members of a sect, who upon a subject of much greater moment have presumed to relinquish the precedent, and arraign the practice of the whole christian world, as far at least as they have been exhibited in these latter ages.

Quis tulerit Gracchos, de seditione querentes.

After setting an example of revolt, it is too late for them to inculcate the duty of submission.

The question of the necessary dependance of communion on baptism, being of no practical moment whatever, in any other circumstances than our own, it is not to be wondered at, if it has never been subjected to scrutiny; since cases of conscience, among which this inquiry may be classed, are rarely, if ever investigated, until circumstances occur, which render their discussion necessary. But as infant sprinkling is valid in the esteem of all but

* This charge is urged with much declamatory vehemence by Mr. Booth in his Apology :—" A sentiment so peculiar, and a conduct so uncommon," he says, " in regard to this institution, ought to be well supported by the testimony of the Holy Ghost. For were all the christian churches now in the world asked, except those few who plead for free communion, whether they thought it lawful to admit *unbaptized* believers to fellowship at the Lord's table, there is reason to believe they would readily unite in the declaration of Paul, *we have no such custom, neither the churches of God that were before us.* Yes, considering the novelty of their sentiments and conduct, and what a contradiction they are to the faith and order of the whole christian church, considering that it never was disputed, as far as I can learn, prior to the sixteenth century, by orthodox or heterodox, by Papist or Protestant, whether *unbaptized* believers should be admitted to the Lord's table; they all agreeing in the contrary practice, however much they differed in matters of equal importance, it may be reasonably expected, and it is by us justly demanded, that the truth of their sentiment, and the rectitude of their conduct, should be *proved, fully proved*, from the records of inspiration."—*Booth's Apology, page* 34.

the Baptists, and there is no pretence for considering the latter as unbaptized, it is not easy to conceive what motive could exist for making it an object of serious attention. That crude and erroneous conceptions should prevail upon questions, the decision of which could have no influence on practice, will not surprise those who reflect, that truth has been usually elicited by controversy, and that on subjects of too great importance to be entirely overlooked, opinions have prevailed to a great extent, which are now universally exploded. Though the employment of coercion in the affairs of conscience, is equally repugnant to the dictates of reason and of scripture, it was for ages, successively resorted to, by every party in their turn; nor was it till towards the close of the seventeenth century, that the principle of toleration was established on a broad and scientifick basis, by the immortal writings of Milton and of Locke. These reflections are obvious; but there are others, which tend more immediately to annihilate the objection under consideration. It is well known, that from a very early period, the most extravagant notions prevailed in the church, with respect to the efficacy of baptism, and its absolute necessity in order to attain salvation. The descent of the human mind from the spirit to the letter, from what is vital and intellectual, to what is ritual and external in religion, is the true source of idolatry and superstition, in all the multifarious forms they have assumed; and as it began early to corrupt the religion of nature, or more properly of patriarchal tradition, so it soon obscured the lustre, and destroyed the simplicity of the christian institute. In proportion as genuine devotion declined, the love of pomp and ceremony increased; the few and simple rites of Christianity were extolled beyond all reasonable bounds; new ones were invented, to which mysterious meanings were attached, till the religion of the New Testament became, in process of time, as insupportable a yoke as the Mosaick law. The first effects of this spirit are discernible in the ideas entertained of the ordinance, so closely connected with the subject of the present treatise. From an erroneous interpretation of the figurative language of a few passages in scripture, in which the sign is identified with the thing signified, very similar to the mistake which afterwards

led to transubstantiation, it was universally supposed, that baptism was invariably accompanied with a supernatural effect, which totally changed the state and character of the candidate, and constituted him a child of God, and an heir of the kingdom of Heaven. Hence, it was almost constantly denoted by the terms *illumination*, *regeneration*, and others, expressive of the highest operations of the Spirit; and as it was believed to obtain the plenary remission of all past sins, it was often, in order to insure that benefit, purposely deferred to the latest period of life. Thus Eusebius informs us, that the Emperour Constantine, "finding his end fast approaching, judged it a fit season for purifying himself from his offences, and cleansing his soul from that guilt, which, in common with other mortals, he had contracted, which he believed was to be effected by the power of mysterious words, and the saving laver." "This," said he, addressing the surrounding bishops, "is the period I have so long hoped and prayed for, the period of obtaining the salvation of God." Passing with the utmost rapidity through the preparatory stage, that of a catechumen, he hastened to what he regarded as his consummation; and no sooner was the ceremony completed, than he arrayed himself in white garments, and laid aside the imperial purple, in token of his bidding adieu to all secular concerns.* We have here a fair specimen of the sentiments which were universally adopted upon this subject in ancient times. Even Justin Martyr, who flourished about the middle of the second century, confounds baptism with regeneration. "Whoever," says he, "believe the things which are affirmed by us to be true, and promise to live accordingly, are afterwards conducted to a place where there is water, and are regenerated by the same method of regeneration which we have experienced."† Theophilus, a contemporary writer, and the sixth bishop of Antioch, holds the same language. Tertullian, the earliest and most learned of the Latin Fathers, exclaims with rapture, "O happy sacrament, by which, being washed from the former sins of our blindness, we are delivered unto eternal life."‡ And agreeable to the fantastick style of imagery, which

* Eusebius in vitâ Constantini, l. 4. c. 61, 62.
† Apol. p. 159, Ed. 1651. ‡ De Baptismo, Ed. 1676, p. 224.

characterises his writings, he appears to be particularly delighted with denominating Christians, little fishes, who are born in water, and are safe only in that element. Were we to attempt accurately to trace the progress of these opinions, in the first ages, and adequately to represent the extent of their prevalence, we should be under the necessity, by numberless quotations from the Fathers, of extending this inquiry to a most unreasonable length.

Suffice it to remark, that there is scarcely a writer in the three first centuries, to descend no lower, who has not spoken upon this subject in a manner, which the advocates for strict communion at least, would deem unscriptural and improper: scarcely one from whom we should not be taught to infer, that baptism was absolutely necessary to salvation. That this is the doctrine, which pervades the formularies of the Church of England, is too evident to require to be insisted on: nor is it less so, that similar sentiments on this head are exhibited, to a greater or less extent, in the creeds of most, if not all established churches. Is it surprising then, that those who contend for baptism as essential to salvation, should consider it as an essential prerequisite to communion? Or is it not a much juster occasion for surprise, that our opponents should urge us with an inference, which it is acknowledged was deduced from erroneous premises, as though we were under the necessity of admitting a conclusion, while the only argument, by which it is supported, is given up?*

For our parts, we must be permitted to look with suspicion, on the genuine product of errour; no more expecting to derive truth from erroneous premises, than grapes from thorns, or figs from thistles. In the present instance, there is no doubt, that the opinion of the absolute necessity of baptism, previous to communion, sprang from those lofty and superstitious ideas, respecting its efficacy, which our opponents would be the first to disclaim. Ask a Roman Catholick, a Lutheran, or a member of the Church

* When I consider the firm hold which these unscriptural ideas respecting baptism had taken of the minds of men, throughout all parts of the christian world at an early period, and recollect the confidence with which ancient writers assert the impossibility even of infants being saved without baptism, the practice of infant sprinkling seems an almost necessary result. Who with such a conviction, possessed of the common feelings of a parent, could fail to secure to his infant offspring such infinite benefits?

of England, on what ground he rests the absolute necessity of the baptismal rite, as a qualification for the eucharist; and each of them will concur in reminding you, that it is by that ordinance, we become the children of God, and heirs of his kingdom. The Augsburgh Confession, to which all the Lutheran churches are supposed to assent, and which was solemnly presented to Charles the Fifth at the Imperial Diet, as the authentick exhibition of their sentiments, expresses itself in the following terms:— "Concerning baptism, they (the followers of Luther) teach that it is *necessary to salvation;* that by baptism is offered the grace of God; and that children are to be baptized, who being presented to God by baptism, are received into the grace of God. They condemn the Anabaptists, who disapprove of the baptism of children, and affirm, that children are *saved* without baptism."* Some of the most learned divines of the Church of England have contended, that baptism is not only regeneration, but justification; and have made elaborate attempts to explode every other notion of that blessing.†

Such are the principles whence this vaunted unanimity is derived—principles which our brethren reprobate on all occasions, while with a strange inconsistency they accuse us of presumption in refusing our assent to their legitimate consequences. Let it be recollected also, that the points in which they, in common with ourselves, dissent from a vast majority of the professors of Christianity, are of incomparably more importance than the particular in which they agree; for whether baptism be, on all occasions, a necessary preliminary to communion, is a trivial question, compared to that which respects the identity of baptism with regeneration.

The argument from authority, however, when fairly stated, is entirely in our favour; nor would it be easy to assign an example of bolder deviation from the universal practice of the christian church, than the conduct of our opponents supplies. They are the only persons in the world of whom we have either heard or read, who contend for the exclusion of genuine Christians from the Lord's table; who ever attempted to distinguish them into

* Augsburgh Confession, Article 9.
† See Waterland's Sermon on that subject.

two classes, such as are entitled to commemorate their Saviour's death, and such as are excluded from that privilege. In what page of the voluminous records of the Church is such a distinction to be traced? Or what intimation shall we find in scripture of an intention to create such an invidious disparity among the members of the same body? Did it ever enter the conception of any but Baptists, that a right to the sign could be separated from the thing signified; or that there could be a description of persons interested in all the blessings of the christian covenant, yet not entitled to partake of its sacraments and seals?

In the judgment of all religious communities besides, and in every period of the Church, excommunication or exclusion has been considered as a stigma, never to be inflicted but on men of ill lives, or on the abettors of heresy and schism; and though innumerable instances have occurred, in which the best of men have in fact been excluded, they were either accused of fundamental errour, or adjudged on account of their obstinate resistence to the authority of the Church, to have forfeited the privileges of Christians. They were not excommunicated under the character of mistaken brethren, which is the light in which we profess to consider Pædobaptists, but as incurable hereticks and schismaticks. The Puritans were expelled the Church of England on the same principle; and although at the Restoration, a vindictive spirit was unquestionably the chief motive to those disgraceful proceedings, yet the pretensions of ecclesiastical authority were carried so high in those unhappy times, as to furnish the pretext for considering them as contumacious contemners of the power, and disturbers of the peace of the Church. In the whole course of ecclesiastical proceedings, no maxim was more fully recognized than that the sword of excommunication cut asunder the ties of fraternity, and consigned the offender, unless he repented, to hopeless perdition.

In some dissenting societies also, it is true, creeds are established which every candidate for admission is expected to subscribe; and though these summaries of christian doctrine frequently contain articles, which, admitting them to be true, are not fundamental, they were originally deemed such by their fabricators, or supposed

at least to be accompanied with such a plenitude of evidence as no sincere inquirer could resist; and they are continued under the same persuasion.

The right of rejecting those whom Christ has received; of refusing the communion of eminently holy men, on account of unessential differences of opinion, is not the avowed tenet of any sect or community in Christendom, with the exception of the majority of the Baptists, who, while they are at variance with the whole world on a point of such magnitude, are loud in accusing their brethren of singularity. If we have presumed to resist the current of opinion, it is on a subject of no practical moment; it respects an obscure and neglected corner of theology; while their singularity is replete with most alarming consequences, destroys at once the unity of the church, and pronounces a sentence of excommunication on the whole christian world.

Having without disguise exhibited in their full force the reasoning of the advocates of strict communion, and replied to it in the best manner we are able, it must be left to the impartial reader to determine on which side the evidence preponderates; of which he will be able to judge more completely, when we have stated at large the grounds of the opposite practice, which we have reserved for the second part of this treatise; where we shall have an opportunity of noticing some minor objections, which could not be so conveniently adverted to in the former.

PART II.

THE POSITIVE GROUNDS ON WHICH WE JUSTIFY THE PRACTICE OF MIXED COMMUNION.

SECTION I.

Free communion urged, from the obligation of brotherly love.

THAT we are commanded, in terms the most absolute, to cultivate a sincere and warm attachment to the members of Christ's body, and that no branch of christian duty is inculcated more frequently, or with more force, will be admitted without controversy. Our Lord instructs us to consider it as the principal mark or feature by which his followers are to be distinguished in every age. "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye love one another. As I have loved you, ye ought also to love one another;" whence it is evident, that the pattern we are to follow, is, the love which Christ bore to his Church, which is undoubtedly extended indiscriminately to every member. The cultivation of this disposition is affirmed to be one of the most essential objects of the christian revelation, as well as the most precious fruit of that faith by which it is embraced. "Seeing," says St. Peter, "ye have purified your hearts by obeying the truth unto an unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently." Agreeably to which, the beloved disciple affirms it to be the chief evidence of our being in a state of grace and salvation. "By this we know that we are passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren." Let it also be remembered, that the mode in which we are commanded to exhibit and express this most eminent grace of the Spirit, is the preservation of union, a careful avoidance of every temper and practice which might produce alienation and division. To this purpose, St. Paul reminds us of that union which subsists betwixt the several parts of the body, the harmony with which its respective functions are carried on, where the noblest organ is incapable of dispensing with the action of the meanest, together with that quick feel-

ing of sympathy which pervades the whole; all which, he tells us, is contrived and adjusted to prevent a schism in the body. In applying this illustration to the subject before us, it is impossible not to perceive, that when one part of Christ's mystical body refuses to co-operate with another in a principal spiritual function, such as communing at the Lord's table, that very evil subsists against which we are so anxiously guarded; and what is more extraordinary, subsists upon the principle we are opposing, by divine appointment. In the last prayer our Saviour uttered, in which he expressly includes all who should hereafter believe, he earnestly intreats that they may be all one, even as he and his Father were one, that the world might be furnished with a convincing evidence of his mission. For some ages the object of that prayer was realized, in the harmony which prevailed amongst Christians, whose religion was a bond of union, more strict and tender than the ties of consanguinity; and with the appellation of brethren, they associated all the sentiments of endearment that relation implied. To see men of the most contrary character and habits, the learned and the rude, the most polished and the most uncultivated, the inhabitants of countries alienated from each other by institutions the most repugnant, and by contests the most violent, forgetting their ancient animosity, and blending into one mass, at the command of a person whom they had never seen, and who had ceased to be an inhabitant of this world, was an astonishing spectacle. Such a sudden assimilation of the most discordant materials, such love issuing from hearts naturally selfish, and giving birth to a new race and progeny, could be ascribed to nothing but a divine interposition: it was an experimental proof of the commencement of that kingdom of God, that celestial economy, by which the powers of the future world are imparted to the present. When we turn from contemplating this, to the practice under consideration, we see an opposite phenomenon; a sect of Christians coming to an open rupture and separation in point of communion with the whole christian world; and we ask, whether it be possible to reconcile such a conduct with the import of our Saviour's prayer. If it is not, it must be condemned as antichristian, unless we hesitate to affirm,

that whatever is repugnant to the mind of Christ, merits that appellation. Let it be remembered too, that though the prayer we have adduced was uttered by him who possessed a perfect knowledge of futurity, and was thoroughly apprized of the diversities of sentiment which would arise among his followers, he was not deterred by that consideration from comprehending in this his desire of union, all who should hereafter believe on his name.

Whatever attachment our opponents may profess to those whom they exclude, their behaviour, it must be acknowledged, is so ill adapted to accredit their professions, that in the eyes of the world, who judge by sensible appearances, and are strangers to subtle distinctions, such a proceeding will inevitably be considered as a practical declaration, that the persons from whom they separate, are *not* Christians. There is no reason to doubt that the precepts of the gospel on this, as well as every other breach of morals, are to be interpreted on a liberal scale; and that when they enjoin any particular disposition in general terms, we must consider the injunction as comprehending all its natural demonstrations, all its genuine expressions. But to refuse the communion of sincere Christians, is not a natural expression of christian love, but so diametrically opposite, that we may fairly put it to the conscience of those who contend for such a measure, whether they find it possible to carry it into execution without an inward struggle, without feeling emotions of sorrow and concern. It is to inflict a wound on the very heart of charity, for no fault, for none at least of which the offender is conscious, for none which such treatment has the remotest tendency to correct; and if this is not being guilty of "beating our fellow servant," we must despair of ascertaining the meaning of terms.

Were the children of the same parent, in consequence of the different construction they put on a disputed clause in their father's will, to refuse to eat at the same table, or to drink out of the same cup, it would be ridiculous for them to pretend that their attachment to each other remained undiminished; nor is it less so for Christians to assert that their withdrawing from communion with their brethren, is no interruption to their mutual harmony and affection. It is a serious and awful interruption, and will

ever be considered in that light as long as the interiour sentiments of the mind continue to be interpreted by their natural signs. I have known more instances than one, of good men complaining of the uneasiness, I might say the anguish, they felt on those occasions, when they witnessed some of their most intimate friends, persons of exalted piety, compelled, after joining in the other branches of worship, to withdraw from the Lord's table, as though "they had no part or lot in the matter." We have been accustomed to conceive that the dictates of the Holy Ghost were always in harmony with his operations, the precepts of the gospel with its spirit; and that nothing was enjoined as matter of duty on Christians, which offered violence to the best feelings of the renewed heart. We have always supposed, that by the law of Christ, we were called to mortify the old man only with his affections and lusts; but if the doctrine of our opponents be true, we shall be frequently summoned to the strange discipline of repressing the movements of christian charity; and the practice of quenching the Spirit, instead of being regarded with horrour, will become on many occasions an indispensable duty. For this new and unheard of conflict, in which the injunctions of Christ, and the dictates of his Spirit, propel us in opposite directions, we acknowledge ourselves unprepared.

In order to place this part of our subject in its strongest light, it is necessary to recur to what we have suggested before, respecting the two-fold import of the eucharist, that it is at first a feast upon a sacrifice, in which we are actual partakers by faith of the body and blood of the Redeemer offered upon the cross. Considered in this view, it is a *federal rite*, in which we receive the pledge of reconciliation, while we avouch the Lord to be our God, and surround his table as a part of his family. In its secondary import, it is intended as a solemn recognition of each other as members of Christ, and consequently, in the language of St. Paul, "as one body, and one bread." Now, we either acknowledge Pædobaptists to be Christians, or we do not. If not, let us speak out without reserve, and justify their exclusion at once, upon a broad and consistent basis. But if we reject a sentiment so illiberal, why refuse to unite with them in an appointment,

which as far as its social import is concerned, has no other object than to express that fraternal attachment which we actually feel? Why select as the line of demarcation, the signal of disunion, that particular branch of worship, which if we credit the inspired writers, was ordained in preference to every other, to be the symbol of christian unity? That they are equally capable with ourselves of deriving the spiritual edification and improvement attached to this ordinance, is implied in the acknowledgment of their being Christians; while with respect to its import as a social act, or an act of communion, it implies neither more nor less than a recognizance of their claim to that title. It neither implies that they are baptized, nor the contrary; it has no retrospective view to that ordinance whatever; it implies neither more nor less than that they are members of Christ, and the objects consequently of that fraternal attachment, which our opponents themselves profess to feel.

SECTION II.

The practice of open communion argued, from the express injunction of scripture respecting the conduct to be maintained by sincere Christians who differ in their religious sentiments.

We are expressly commanded in the scriptures to tolerate in the church those diversities of opinion which are not inconsistent with salvation. We learn from the New Testament that a diversity of views subsisted in the times of the Apostles, betwixt the Jewish and Gentile converts especially, the former retaining an attachment to the ancient law, and conceiving the most essential parts of it to be still in force; the latter from correcter views, rejecting it altogether. Some declined the use of certain kinds of meat forbidden by Moses, which others partook of without scruple: "one man esteemed one day above another," conscientiously observing the principal Jewish solemnities; "another esteemed every day alike." Among the Jewish converts, very different sentiments were entertained on the subject of circumcision, which all appear to have observed, though upon different principles; the more enlightened, like St Paul, from a solicitude to avoid unnecessary offence: the more superstitious, from

a persuasion of its intrinsick obligation; and some because they believed it impossible to be saved without it; by which they endangered, to say the least, the fundamental doctrine of justification by faith. Against the sentiment last mentioned, we find St. Paul protesting with vehemence, and affirming with all the authority of his office, that "if any man was circumcised" with such views, "Christ profited him nothing;" but on no occasion proceeding to excommunication. The contention arising from the discussion of these points became so violent, that there appeared no method of terminating it, but to depute Paul and Barnabas to go up to Jerusalem, to consult the Apostles, who being solemnly convened on the occasion, issued the famous decree contained in the fifteenth of the Acts, by which the liberty of the gospel was confirmed, and the domineering spirit of Jewish zealots repressed. Though the success of this measure was great, it was not complete; a contrariety of opinion and of practice prevailed in the church respecting Jewish ceremonies and observances, which considerably impaired its harmony. But instead of attempting to silence the remaining differences, by interposing his authority, St. Paul enjoins mutual toleration. "Him that is weak in faith receive ye not to doubtful disputations. For one believeth that he may eat all things; another who is weak eateth herbs. Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and let not him that eateth not, judge him that eateth; for God hath received him. Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? unto his own master he standeth, or falleth. Yea, he shall be holden up; for God is able to make him stand. One man esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind."*

To the same purpose are the following injunctions in the next chapter:—"We then that are strong, ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Now the God of peace and consolation grant you to be like minded one towards another according to Jesus Christ, that ye may with one mind and with one mouth, glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received

* Romans xiv. 1. 5.

us, to the glory of God."* It cannot be denied, that the passages we have adduced contain an apostolick canon for the regulation of the conduct of such Christians as agree in fundamentals, while they differ on points of subordinate importance: by this canon they are commanded to exercise a reciprocal toleration and indulgence, and on no account to proceed to an open rupture. In order to apply it to the question under consideration, it is only necessary to consider to what description of persons the rule extends. The persons we are commanded to receive are the *weak in faith.* From the context, as well as from other parts of his epistles, it is certain that St. Paul means to designate by that appellation, sincere though erring Christians; and in the instance then under contemplation, persons whose organs were not yet attempered to the blaze of gospel light and liberty, but who still clung to certain legal usages and distinctions, which more comprehensive views of revelation would have taught them to discard. The term *weak* is employed by the same writer in his epistle to the Corinthians, to denote an *erroneous* conscience, founded on a false persuasion of a certain power and efficacy attached to idols, of which they are really destitute. "For himself," he tells us, "he knew that an idol was nothing, but every one was not possessed of that knowledge; for some with conscience of the idol, with an interiour conviction of its power, eat of the sacrifice, as a thing offered to an idol, and their conscience being *weak*, is defiled." In the chapter whence these words are quoted, the term *weak* occurs not less than five times, and in each instance is used as synonymous with *erroneous.* I have insisted the more on this particular, in order to obviate a misconception which may arise from the acknowledged ambiguity of the word *weak*, which might be supposed to intend not a mistaken or erring mind, but a mind not sufficiently confirmed in the truth to which it assents. The certainty of its comprehending the case of errour being once admitted, it is not necessary to multiply words to evince its bearing on the present controversy; all that remains to be considered is the *principle* on which toleration is enforced, which every impar-

* Romans xv. 1, 6, 7.

tial reader must perceive, is the assumption, that the errours and mistakes to be tolerated are not *fundamental*, not of such a nature, in other words, as to prevent those who maintain them, from being accepted with God. "Let not him that eateth, despise him who eateth not; and let not him that eateth not, judge him that eateth; *for God hath received him.*" What can this mean, but that the errour in question, to whichsoever side it be imputed, was of a description not to exclude its abettor from being an accepted servant of God, who, as he at present bears with his infirmity, is well able, whenever he pleases, to correct and remove it. He further proceeds to urge a spirit of forbearance, from a consideration of the perfect integrity with which both parties maintained their respective opinions. Both were equally conscientious, and therefore, neither deserved to be treated with severity. "Wherefore receive ye one another," he adds, "even as Christ has received you, to the glory of the Father." When he thus commands Christians to receive each other, and enforces that duty by the example of Christ, it surely requires little penetration to perceive, that the practice enjoined ought to be commensurate to that example, and that this precept obliges us to receive all whom Christ has received. To interpret it otherwise, is to suppose the example irrelevant, and at once to annihilate the principle on which the injunction is founded.

Having paved the way to the conclusion, to which we would conduct the reader, we have only to remark, that in order to determine, how far these apostolick injunctions oblige us to tolerate the supposed errour of our Pædobaptist brethren, we have merely to consider, whether it necessarily excludes them from being of the number of those, whom Christ has received, to the glory of the Father, whether it be possible to hold it with christian sincerity, and finally, whether its abettors will stand or fall in the eternal judgment.

If these questions are answered, in the way which christian candour irresistibly suggests, and which the judgment of our opponents approves, they conclude in favour of the admission of Pædobaptists to communion, not less forcibly than if they had been mentioned by name; and all attempts to evade them, must prove futile and

abortive. If it be asserted, on the contrary, that a mistake on the subject of baptism is not comprehended in the above description, the passages adduced must be acknowledged irrelevant, and the whole controversy assumes a new aspect.

In the same spirit, the Apostle earnestly presses on the Philippians, the obligation of maintaining an uninterrupted harmony, and of cultivating a fraternal affection to each other, even while he is contemplating the possibility of their entertaining different apprehensions respecting truth and duty. After proposing himself as an example of the renunciation of legal hopes, and the serious study of perfection, he adds, "Let us, therefore, as many as are *perfect*, as many as have obtained correct and enlarged views of the gospel, be thus minded; and if in any thing ye are otherwise minded, or rather, *differently* minded, possessing different views and apprehensions on certain subjects, God will reveal even this unto you.* Nevertheless, wherein we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing." Here, the case of a diversity of sentiment, arising among Christians, is distinctly assumed, and the proper remedy suggested, which is not the exercise of a compulsory power, much less a separation of communion, but the ardent pursuit of christian piety, accompanied with a humble dependance on divine teaching, which, it may reasonably be expected, will in due time correct the errours and imperfections of sincere believers. The conduct to be maintained in the mean while, was a cordial co-operation in every branch of worship and of practice, with respect to which they were agreed, without attempting to effect an unanimity by force; and this is precisely the conduct which we contend should be maintained towards our Pædobaptist brethren. If they can be repelled from the Lord's table, without violating both the letter and the spirit of the preceding, and of similar admonitions, we are prepared, however reluctantly, to acquiesce in their exclusion; but if they cannot, it deserves the serious consideration of the advocates of that measure, how they can reconcile the palpable in-

* See an admirable criticism on this passage in Bishop Horseley's Sermons, where the word στοιχειν, which is the key to the whole passage, is most happily elucidated.—*Vol. 2, page 358.*

fringement of such precepts, with the scrupulous adherence to the dictates of scripture, to which they make such loud pretensions.

It will surely not be denied, that the precepts of the gospel are entitled to at least as much reverence, as apostolical precedents, when it is remembered, that the language of the former, as is befitting laws, is clear and determinate, while inferences deduced from the latter are frequently subject to debate; not to remark, that if we consider the spirit of scripture precedent, it will be found entirely in our favour.

When the abettors of exclusive communion are pressed with the conclusions, resulting from the passages we have quoted, and others of a similar tendency, their usual answer is, that the inspired writers make no mention of baptism on these occasions, and that no allusion is had to a diversity of opinion on the positive institutions of the gospel; which is perfectly true, and perfectly foreign to the purpose for which it is alleged; for the question at issue is not—What were the individual errours we are commanded to tolerate; but—What is the *ground* on which that measure is enforced, and whether it be sufficiently comprehensive to include the Pædobaptists. That it is so, that they are actually included, can only be denied, by affirming, that they are precluded from divine acceptance, since it is precisely on that ground, that St. Paul rests the plea of toleration. To object to the application of a general principle to a particular case, that it is not the identical one which first occasioned its enunciation, is egregious trifling, and would go to the subversion of all general principles whatever, and consequently put an end to all reasoning. When a doubtful point in morality is to be decided, by an appeal to a general principle, it is an essential property of such a principle, to extend to more particulars than one; since, if it did not, it would cease to be a principle, and the point in question would be left to be decided by itself; and if not self-evident, could admit of no decision whatever. When Nadab and Abihu, intoxicated with wine, offered strange fire upon the altar, and were struck with instant death for their presumption, Moses, by divine command, prescribed the following general rule for the worship of God:—"I will be sanctified

of all them that draw nigh unto me, and before all the people will I be glorified." Who can be at a loss to perceive, the absurdity of limiting that precept to the prohibition of intoxication, the crime which occasioned its first promulgation, instead of extending it to every instance of levity and impiety, in an approach to the divine Majesty. My consciousness of the extreme weight of prejudice, which the truth has to encounter, together with the inaptitude of many, who are most interested in this controversy, to ascend to first principles, is my only apology for insisting upon a point so obvious; choosing, rather to hazard the contempt of the wise, than not to impress conviction on the vulgar.

With such as admit the possibility of Pædobaptists being saved, there remains, in my apprehension, no alternative, but either to receive them into their communion, without scruple, as comprehended within the apostolick canon, or to affirm that decision to be founded on erroneous grounds; which at once removes the controversy to a superiour tribunal, where they and the Apostle must implead each other. Let us, however, briefly examine certain distinctions they have recourse to, in order to elude the force of these passages. In the first place, it has been alleged, that though we are commanded to *receive* our mistaken brethren, we are not instructed to receive them at the Lord's table, or into the external communion of the church; and that such injunctions are consequently irrelevant to the inquiry respecting the right of persons of a similar character, to those external privileges, of which they make no mention. "Is there no way," say our opponents, "of receiving him that is weak in faith, but by admitting him to the Lord's table? Must the exhortation to receive a christian brother be confined to that single instance of true benevolence?"* To this we reply, that we know of none who assert that the term *receive* must necessarily be limited to the single act of a reception at the Lord's table; but we affirm, without hesitation, that he is not *received*, in the sense of the Apostle, who is denied that privilege. Had the parties whom he addressed proceeded to an open rupture, in point of com-

* Booth's Apology, page 101.

munion, would they, in the judgment of our opponents, have complied with the purport and spirit of his injunction? And if, after adopting such a measure, they had appealed to the Apostle, whether there "were no other way of receiving their brethren but by admitting them to the Lord's table," would he, or would he not, have considered himself as mocked and insulted? Mr. Booth enumerates many instances in St. Paul's epistles, in which he enjoins Christians to *receive* certain persons, such as Phœbe, Onesimus, Epaphroditus, and himself, where an admission to the Lord's table was not intended, but something which he informs us would manifest their love in a much higher degree.* What a convincing demonstration of the propriety of withholding from persons of a similar character, that lower, that inferiour token of esteem which is included in christian fellowship! And because the bare admission of all the persons mentioned, to the external communion of the church, did not satisfy the ardent benevolence of the Apostle, without more decided and discriminate marks of attachment, nor answer, in the opinion of our opponents, to the full import of the word *receive*, the true method of realizing his intentions, is to reject the modern Phœbe and Onesimus altogether.

"Supposing, however," says Mr. Booth, "that there were no way of receiving one that is weak in faith, but by admitting him to the Lord's table, this text would be far from proving that which our opponents desire; unless they could make it appear, that the persons of whom the Apostle immediately speaks, were *not members* of the Church of Rome, when he gave the advice."† If there be any weight in this argument, it must proceed on the supposition, that if the persons, whom the Apostle enjoins the Romans to receive, had not been already members, there is no sufficient ground for believing, notwithstanding the strain of his admonitions, that they would have been admitted. But is it possible to suppose, that he would have recommended a class of persons so earnestly, to the affectionate regards of a christian society, whom he would not have previously deemed eligible to their communion; or that the primitive discipline was so soon

* Booth's Apology, page 102. † Booth's Apology, page 82.

relaxed, as to occasion the continuance in the church, of such, as would have been originally deemed unworthy candidates? Most assuredly, they, who, upon valid grounds, would have been rejected if they had not already been members, were never permitted to boast the protection and patronage of an inspired Apostle, after they became such. In every well-ordered society, the privileges attached to it are forfeited by that conduct in its members, whatever it be, which would have been an effectual obstacle to their admission, and to suppose this maxim reversed in a christian church, and that an Apostle would caress, protect, and commend persons, who might justly have been debarred from entering, is an absurdity, which few minds can digest. The necessity of recurring to such suppositions, is itself a sufficient confutation of the system they are brought to defend.

Our opponents still insist upon it, that no conclusion can be drawn from the command, to receive *the weak in faith*, unless it could be shewn, that they were *unbaptized*. But this mode of reasoning, pursued to its consequences, would annihilate all the general axioms of scripture,* and considering the infinite diversity of human circumstances, render them a most incompetent guide. If the Holy Spirit has been pleased to command us, without exception, to receive *the weak in faith*, and instructed us in the grounds on which this decision proceeded, which is plainly the acceptance of such with God—if the Apostles, acting under his direction, governed the church on the same principles, and suffered no breach of communion to be effected, but on account of a vicious life, or fundamental errour, the criminality attached to an opposite course of procedure will be very little extenuated by a circumstantial difference in its objects. Had those, whom the Apostles commanded their converts to tolerate, been *unbaptized*, the inference in favour of Pædobaptists would unquestionably have been more obvious, but not more certain, because nothing can be more evident, than that they urged the duty of toleration on a principle, which, even

* "But admitting that to be a fact," says Mr. Booth, "of which there is not the least evidence, the conclusion drawn from the passage would not be just, except it were also proved, that the weak in faith were unbaptized, or at least so considered by their stronger brethren, for that is the point in dispute between us."—*Booth's Apology, page* 104.

in the judgment of our opponents, equally applies to the Pædobaptists, which is, that the errour in each case is compatible with a state of salvation, and may be held with an upright conscience.

However systems and opinions may fluctuate, truth is eternal; and if these were solid grounds of mutual forbearance and indulgence heretofore, they must still continue such; but if they were not, St. Paul must be acknowledged to have reasoned inconclusively, and all idea of plenary inspiration must be abandoned. As the case stands, the advocates of exclusive communion must either assert, in direct contradiction to his statement, that the compatibility of an errour with the state of salvation, and with what comes nearly to the same point, the perfect sincerity of its abettor, is not a sufficient reason for its being tolerated in the church, or consign the Pædobaptists, who die in their sentiments, to eternal destruction. In this dilemma, they are at liberty to adopt which position they please, but from both, it is impossible to escape.

In order, as it should seem, to perplex the mind of the reader on this part of the subject, our opponents endeavour to confound that interposition of mercy, by which, impenitent sinners are introduced into a state of salvation, with the gracious acceptance of believers.*

With this view we are reminded, that God receives such as are dead in sins. Whether it be safe to assert, that God accepts the impenitent at all, while their impenitence continues, I shall not stay to inquire: it is certain, they are not received in the *same sense* as genuine Christians, nor in the sense the Apostle intended, when he enjoined forbearance towards the *weak in faith.* That Christ receives men *in their sins*, so as to adopt them into

* "Yet permit me to ask," says Mr. Booth, "is the divine conduct, is the favour of God, or the kindness of Christ in receiving sinners, the rule of our proceeding in the administration of positive institutions? Whom does God, whom does Christ receive? None but those who believe and profess faith in the Lord Messiah? Our brethren will not affirm it. For if divine compassion did not extend to the dead in sin; if the kindness of Christ did not relieve the enemies of God, none of our fellow race would ever be saved. But does it hence follow, that we must admit the unbelieving, or the unconverted, either to baptism or the holy supper? Our gracious Lord freely accepts all that desire it, and all that come, but are we bound to receive every one that solicits communion with us?"—*Booth's Apology, page* 106.

his family, and make them heirs of eternal life, is a doctrine offensive to pious ears, most remote from the language of scripture, and from all sober theology. But if they intend something essentially distinct from this, for what purpose it is introduced, except with a view to shelter themselves under the cover of an ambiguous term, I am at a loss to conjecture. In the mean time, it is obvious, that the design of these contortions is to get rid, if possible, of a principle, which originated not with us, but with St. Paul, that we ought to accept those whom we acknowledge Christ to have accepted. This is still more evident, when we find them adducing the excommunication of unworthy members, such as the incestuous man at Corinth, who, it is asserted, was all along an object of divine favour, as a proof, that the rule which that inspired writer has laid down, may be safely neglected. In reply to which, it is sufficient to ask—In what light was the incestuous person regarded,* when he declared his determination to deliver him to Satan, for the destruction of the flesh? Was it under the character of a member of Christ, or an enemy to the gospel? If we believe his own representation, he deemed it necessary for him to be expelled as an infectious leaven, the continuance of which would corrupt the whole mass; so that whatever proofs of repentance he might afterwards exhibit, these could have no influence on the principle on which he was excluded. When the professors of Christianity are guilty of deliberate violation of the laws of Christ, they are to be treated agreeably to the conduct they exhibit, as bad men, with a hope, that the severity of discipline may reclaim and restore them to the paths of rectitude.

To justify the practice of exclusive communion, by placing Pœdobaptists, who form the great body of the faithful, on the same level with men of impure and vicious lives, is equally repugnant to reason, and offensive to charity; at the same time that it is manifest, from this mode of reasoning, that the measure contended for is

* "Besides, gospel churches," says Mr. Booth, "are sometimes obliged to exclude from their communion those whom he has received, as appears from the case of the incestuous person in the church of Corinth. And have those churches which practise free communion never excluded any for scandalous backslidings, whom, notwithstanding, they could not but consider as received of Christ?"—*Booth's Apology, page* 106.

considered in the light of *punishment*. Whether our Pædobaptist brethren are the proper objects of it, or whether it is adopted to promote the only legitimate ends of punishment, must be left to future inquiry.

SECTION III.

Pædobaptists a part of the true church, and their exclusion on that account unlawful.

Before we proceed to urge the argument announced in this section, it will be necessary to ascertain the precise import of the word *Church*, as it is employed in the holy scriptures. If we examine the New Testament, we shall find that the term church, as a religious appellation, occurs in two senses only; it either denotes the whole body of the faithful, or some one assembly of Christians associated for the worship of God. In the former sense, it is styled in the Apostle's creed, catholick, or universal; a belief in the existence of which, forms one of its principal articles. In this sense, Jesus Christ is affirmed to be "Head over all things to the church, which is his body." It is in this collective view of it, that we affirm its perpetuity. When the term is employed to denote a particular assembly of Christians, it is invariably accompanied with a specification of the place where it was accustomed to convene, as for example, the church at Corinth, at Ephesus, or at Rome. Now it is manifest from scripture, that these two significations of the word differ from each other only as a part differs from a whole, so that when the whole body of believers is intended, it is used in its absolute form; when a particular society is meant, it is joined with a local specification. It is never used in the New Testament as in modern times, to denote the aggregate of christian assemblies throughout a province, or a kingdom; nor do we ever read of the church of Achaia, Galatia, et cætera, but of the *churches*, in the plural number; the word being constantly applied either to the whole number of the faithful, scattered throughout the world, or to some single congregation or society. It is equally obvious, that whenever the word church occurs in its absolute form, it comprehends all genuine Christians without exception, and as that Church is affirmed to be

his body, it could not enter into the conception of the inspired writers that there were a class of persons strictly united to Christ, who yet were none of its component parts.

By orthodox Christians it is uniformly maintained, that union to Christ is formed by faith, and as the Baptists are distinguished by demanding a profession of it at baptism, they, at least, are precluded from asserting that rite to have any concern in effecting the spiritual alliance in question. In their judgment at least, since faith precedes the application of water, the only means of union are possessed by the abettors of infant sprinkling equally with themselves; who are therefore equally of the "body of Christ, and members in particular." But since the Holy Ghost identifies that body with the church, explaining the one by the other, ("for his body's sake, which is the church,") it seems impossible to deny, that they are fully entitled to be considered in the catholick sense of the term, as members of the christian church. And as the universal church is nothing more than the collective body of the faithful, and differs only from a particular assembly of Christians, as the whole from a part, it is equally impossible to deny that a Pædobaptist society, is, in the more limited import of the word, a true church.

If we consider the matter in a light somewhat different, we shall be conducted to the same conclusion, and be compelled to confess that Pædobaptist societies are, or at least may be, notwithstanding the practice of infant sprinkling, true churches. The idea of plurality, it will be admitted, adds nothing to the nature of the object to which it is attached. The idea of a number of men differs nothing in kind from that of a single man, except that it involves a repetition, or multiplication of the same idea. But the term church is merely a numerical term, denoting a multitude, or an assembly of men; and for the same reason that a number of men meeting together constitutes an assembly, or *church*,* in the most comprehensive import of the word, so a number of Christians convened for the worship of God, constitutes a christian assembly, or a *church*. Such an assembly, will necessarily be modified

* Acts xix. 32—"For the assembly was confused." The original word is η εκκλησια, the term usually rendered *church*.

by the character of the members which compose it; if their sentiments are erroneous, the church will proportionably imbibe a tincture of errour; but to affirm, that though it consists of real Christians, a society of such assembled for christian worship is not a true church, is to attribute to the idea of *plurality* or of *number* the power of changing the nature or essence of the object with which it is united, which involves a contradiction to our clearest perceptions. If we adhere to the dictates of reason or of scripture, when we give the appellation of a church to a particular society of Christians, we shall mingle nothing in our conceptions, beyond what enters into our ideas of an individual Christian, with the exception of this circumstance only, that it denotes a number of such individuals actually assembled, or wont to assemble for the celebration of divine worship. Though the definition of a church has often been the occasion of much confused disquisition, especially when the term has been applied exclusively to the clergy, the Baptists, I believe, are the only persons who have scrupled to assign that appellation to societies acknowledged to consist of sincere and spiritual worshippers: a notion which, however repugnant to the dictates of candour, or of common sense, is the necessary appendage of the practice, equally absurd, of confining their communion to their own denomination.

Having shewn, we trust to the satisfaction of the reader, that pædobaptism is not an errour of such magnitude, as to prevent the society which maintains it from being deemed a true church, I proceed to observe, that to repel the members of such a society from communion, is the very essence of schism. Schism is a causeless and unnecessary separation from the church of Christ, or from any part of it; and that secession cannot urge the plea of necessity, where no concurrence in what is deemed evil, no approbation of errour or superstition, is involved in communion. In the case before us, by admitting a Pædobaptist to the Lord's supper, no sanction whatever is given to infant sprinkling, no act of concurrence is involved or implied; nothing is done, or left undone, which would have not been equally so, if his attendance were withdrawn. Under such circumstances, the necessity of preserving the purity of worship, or of avoiding an active

co-operation in what we deem sinful or erroneous (the only justifiable ground of separation,) has no place. The objection to his admission is founded solely on a disapprobation of a particular practice considered, not as it affects us, since no part of our religious practice is influenced by it, but in relation to its intrinsick demerits.

Division amongst Christians, especially when it proceeds to a breach of communion, is so fraught with scandal, and so utterly repugnant to the genius of the gospel, that the suffrages of the whole christian world have concurred in regarding it as an evil, on no occasion to be incurred, but for the avoidance of a greater—the violation of conscience. Whenever it becomes impossible to continue in a religious community, without concurring in practices, and sanctioning abuses, which the word of God condemns, a secession is justified by the apostolick voice, "Come out of her my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues." On this principle, the conduct of the Reformers, in separating from the Roman Hierarchy, admits of an ample vindication: in consequence of the introduction of superstitious rites and ceremonies, it became impracticable to continue in her communion, without partaking of her sins; and for a similar reason the Non-conformists seceded from the church of England, where ceremonies were enforced, and an ecclesiastical polity established, incompatible, as they conceived, with the purity and simplicity of the christian institute. In each of these cases, the blame of schism did not attach to the separatists, but to that spirit of imposition which rendered such a measure requisite. In each instance it was an act of self-preservation, rendered unavoidable by the highest necessity, that of declining to concur in practices at which their conscience revolted. But what similarity to this is discernible in the conduct of the advocates of strict communion? They are not engaged in preserving their own liberty, but in an attack on the liberty of others; their object is not to preserve the worship in which they join, pure from contamination; but to sit in judgment on the consciences of their brethren, and to deny them the privileges of the visible church on account of a difference of opinion, which is neither imposed on themselves, nor deemed fundamental. They propose to

build a church, upon the principle of an absolute exclusion of a multitude of societies, which they must either acknowledge to be true churches, or be convicted, as we have seen, of the greatest absurdity; while, for a conduct so monstrous and unnatural, they are precluded from the plea of necessity, because no attempt is made by Pædobaptists to modify their worship, or to control the most enlarged exercise of private judgment. Upon the principle for which I am contending, they are not called to renounce their peculiar tenets on the subject of baptism, nor to express their approbation of a contrary practice; but simply not to sever themselves from the body of Christ, nor refuse to unite with his church.

However familiar the spectacle of christian societies, who have no fellowship or intercourse with each other, has become, he who consults the New Testament will instantly perceive, that nothing more repugnant to the dictates of inspiration, or to the practice of the first and purest age, can be conceived. When we turn our eyes to the primitive times, we behold one church of Christ, and one only, in which, when new assemblies of Christians arose, they were considered, not as multiplying, but diffusing it; not as destroying its unity, or impairing its harmony, but being fitly compacted together on the same foundation, as a mere accession to the beauty and grandeur of the whole. The spouse of Christ, like a prolifick mother, exulted in her numerous offspring, who were all equally cherished in her bosom, and grew up at her side. As the necessity of departing from these maxims, or of appearing to depart from them at least, by forming separate societies, arose entirely from that spirit of ecclesiastical tyranny and superstition which was gradually developed, so a similar measure is justifiable, as far as that necessity extends, and no farther. In the case of strict communion, it has no place whatever. In that case, it is not a defensive, but an offensive measure; it is not an assertion of christian liberty, by resisting encroachment; it is itself a violent encroachment on the freedom of others; not an effort to preserve our own worship pure, but to enforce a conformity to our views, in a point acknowledged not essential to salvation. That the unity of the church cannot be maintained upon those principles,

that if every errour is to be opposed, not by mild remonstrance, and scriptural argument, but by making it the pretext of a breach of communion, nothing but a series of animosities and divisions can ensue, the experience of past ages has rendered sufficiently evident. If, amidst the infinite diversity of opinions, each society deems it necessary to render its own peculiarities the basis of union, as though the design of Christians, in forming themselves into a church, were not to exhibit the great principles of the gospel, but to give publicity and effect to party distinctions, all hope of restoring christian harmony and unanimity must be abandoned. When churches are thus constituted, instead of enlarging the sphere of christian charity, they become so many hostile confederacies.

If it be once admitted, that a body of men, associating for christian worship, have a right to enact as terms of communion, something more than is included in the terms of salvation, the question suggested by St. Paul—"Is Christ divided?" is utterly futile: what he considered as a solecism is reduced to practice, and established by law. How is it possible to attain or preserve unanimity in the absence of an intelligible standard? and when we feel ourselves at liberty to depart from a divine precedent, and to affect a greater nicety and scrupulosity, in the separation of the precious and the vile, than the Searcher of Hearts; when we follow the guidance of private partialities and predilections, without pretending to regulate our conduct by the pattern of our great Master; who is at a loss to perceive the absolute impossibility of preserving the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace? Of what is essential to salvation, it is not difficult to judge: the quiet of the conscience requires, that the information on this subject should be clear and precise: whatever is beyond, is involved in comparative obscurity, and subject to doubtful disputation.

There are certain propositions, which produce on a mind free from prejudice, such instantaneous conviction, as scarcely to admit of formal proof. Of this nature is the following position, that it is presumptuous to aspire to a greater purity and strictness in selecting the materials of a church, than are observed by its divine founder; and those whom he forms and actuates by his Spirit, and

admits to communion with himself, are sufficiently qualified for the communion of mortals. What can be alleged, in contradiction to a truth so indubitable and so obvious? Nothing but a futile distinction (futile in relation to the present subject) betwixt the moral, and the positive parts of Christianity. We are told again and again, that the Lord's supper is a positive and arbitrary institution, in consequence of which, the right to it is not to be judged of by moral considerations, and general reasonings, but by express prescription and command.

Willing to meet objectors on their own ground, we request them to point us to the passage in the code of inspiration, where unbaptized Christians are forbidden to participate; and all the answer we receive, consists merely of those inferences and arguments from analogy, against which they protest, so that our opponents, unsupported by the letter of scripture, are obliged to have recourse to general reasoning, not less than ourselves, however lame and defective that reasoning may be.

When we urge them with the fact, that all genuine Christians are received by Christ, and that his conduct in this instance is proposed as a pattern for our imitation, they are compelled to shift their ground; and, although it is evident to every one who reflects, that we mean to assert the obligation of adhering to that example, only as far as it is known, they adduce the instance of immoral professors, who, though received, as they contend, by Christ, are justly rejected by the church. But how, we ask, are we to ascertain the fact, that such persons are accepted of Christ, till they give proof of their repentance? Is it precisely the same thing, to neglect a known rule of action, as to cease to follow it, when it is involved in hopeless obscurity? Admitting for argument's sake, that disorderly livers have uninterrupted union with the Saviour, it is impossible that we should know it, while they continue impenitent, and therefore, on such occasions, it ceases to be a rule. But in rejecting Pædobaptists in the mass, they reject a numerous class of Christians, whom they know and acknowledge to be temples of the Holy Ghost. If the two cases are parallel, we acknowledge the justice of the conclusion; if not, what more futile and absurd? Let it be remembered, however, that all this quibbling

and tergiversation, are employed to get rid of an apostolick canon, and that they bear upon our principles in no other sense, than as they tend to nullify or impair the force of an inspired maxim. If we are in an errour, we deem it no small felicity to err in such company.

Before I close this section, I must be permitted to remark an inconsistency in the conduct of our opponents, connected with this part of the subject, which has often excited my surprise. Disclaiming, as they do, all communion with Pædobaptists, and refusing to acknowledge them as a legitimate part of the christian church, we should naturally expect they would shun every approach to such a recognition of them, with peculiar care, in devotional exercises, in solemn addresses to the Deity. Nothing, on the contrary, is more common, than the interchange of religious services betwixt Baptists and Independents, in which the Pædobaptist minister is solemnly recommended to the Supreme Being, as the pastor of the church, and his blessing earnestly implored on the relation they stand in to each other; nor is it unusual for a Baptist to officiate at the ordination of an independent minister, by delivering a charge, or inculcating the duties of the people, in a discourse appropriated to the occasion. They feel no objection to have communion with Pædobaptists in prayer and praise, the most solemn of all acts of worship, even on an occasion immediately connected with the recognition of a religious society; but no sooner does the idea of the Eucharist occur, than it operates like a spell, and all this language is changed, and these sentiments vanish. It is surely amusing, to behold a person solemnly inculcating the reciprocal duties of a relation, which on his principles has no existence; and interceding expressly in behalf of a pastor and a church, when, if we credit his representations at other times, that church is illegitimate, and the title of pastor consequently a mere usurpation. Although it must be acknowledged, that the approach of Pædobaptists to the sacred table is, on their principles, a presumptuous intrusion, it is seldom, that the advocates of strict communion feel any scruple in attempting, by devotional exercises, to prepare the mind for the right performance of what they are accustomed to stigmatize as radically wrong. For my part, I am utterly at a loss

to reconcile these discrepancies. Is it that they consider less attention to truth, a less exact correspondence betwixt the language and the sentiments, requisite in addressing the Deity, than in discoursing with their fellow mortals? Or is it not more candid to suppose, that devotion elevates them to a higher region, where they breathe a freer air, and look down upon the petty subtleties of a thorny, disputatious theology, with a just and sovereign contempt?

SECTION IV.

The exclusion of Pædobaptists from the Lord's table, considered as a punishment.

The refusal of the eucharist to a professor of Christianity can be justified only on the ground of his supposed criminality; of his embracing heretical sentiments, or living a vicious life. As the sentence of exclusion is the severest the church can inflict, and no punishment just, but in proportion to the degree of preceding delinquency, it follows of course, that he who incurs the total privation of church-privileges, must be considered eminently in the light of an offender. When the incestuous person was separated from the church at Corinth, it was regarded by St. Paul as a *punishment*, and that of no ordinary magnitude:—"Sufficient," said he, "is this punishment, which was inflicted of many." Nor is there any difference, with respect to the present inquiry, betwixt the refusal of a candidate, and the expulsion of a member; since nothing will justify the former of these measures, which might not be equally alleged in vindication of the latter. Both amount to a declaration of the parties being unworthy to communicate. The language held by our opponents is sufficiently decisive on this head:—"It is not every one," says Mr. Booth, "that is received of Jesus Christ, who is entitled to communion at his table; but such, and such only, as revere his authority, submit to his ordinances, and obey the laws of his house."* Hence to be consistent with themselves, they must impute to Pædo-

* Apology, page 107.

baptists universally, a degree of delinquency equal to that which attaches to the most flagrant breaches of immorality; and deem them equally guilty in the sight of God, with those unjust persons, idolaters, revellers, and extortioners, who are declared incapable of entering into the kingdom of heaven. For if the guilt imputed in this instance, is acknowledged to be of a totally different order from that which belongs to the openly vicious and profane, how come they to be included in the same sentence; and where is the equity of animadverting upon unequal faults, with equal severity.

To be consistent also, they must invariably refuse to tolerate every species of imperfection in their members, which in their judgment is equally criminal with the Pædobaptist errour; but how far they are from maintaining this impartiality, is too obvious to admit of a question. In churches whose discipline is the most rigid, it will not be denied that many are tolerated, who are chargeable with conduct more offensive in the sight of God, than a misconception of the nature of a positive institute; nor will they assert that a Brainerd, a Doddridge, or a Leighton, had more to answer for at the supreme tribunal, on the score of infant-baptism, than the most doubtful of those imperfect Christians, whom they retain without scruple in their communion. Let them remember too, that this reasoning proceeds not on the principle of the innocence of errour in general, or of infant sprinkling in particular; but on the contrary, that it takes for granted, that some degree of blame attaches to a neglect, though involuntary, of a positive precept; we wish only to be informed, on what principle of equity it is proposed, in the infliction of ecclesiastical censures, to equalise things which are not equal.

From those injunctions of St. Paul which have already been distinctly noticed, where he enforces the duty of reciprocal toleration, we find him insisting on certain circumstances, adapted to diminish the moral estimate of the errours in question, and to shew that they involved a very inconsiderable portion of blame, compared to that which the zealots, on either side, were disposed to impute. Such is the statement of their not being fundamental, of the possibility of their being held with a pure conscience,

and the certainty that both parties were equally comprehended within the terms of salvation. In thus attempting to form an estimate of the magnitude of the mistakes and misconceptions of our fellow christians in a moral view, for the purpose of regulating our treatment of them, we are justified by the highest authority; and the only rational inquiry seems to be, whether infant baptism is really more criminal than those acknowledged imperfections, which are allowed to be proper objects of christian forbearance. If it be affirmed that it is, we request our opponents to reconcile this assertion with the high encomiums they are wont to bestow on Pædobaptists, many of whom they feel no hesitation in classing, on other occasions, with the most eminent saints upon earth. That they are perfectly exempt from blame, we are not contending; but this strange combination of vice and virtue in the same persons, by which they are at once justly excluded from the church as *criminal*, and extolled as saints, is perfectly incomprehensible. The advocates of this doctrine attempt to conceal its deformity, by employing an attenuated and ambiguous phraseology, and instead of speaking of Pædobaptists in the terms their system demands, are fond of applying the epithets, irregular, disorderly, &c. to their conduct. Still the question returns—Is this imputed irregularity, innocent, or criminal? If the former, why punish it at all? If the latter, surely the punishment should be proportioned to the guilt; and if it exceed the measure awarded to offences equally aggravated, we must either pronounce it unjust, or confound the distinction of right and wrong. But if the forfeiture of all the privileges attached to christian society, is incurred merely by infant-baptism, while numerous imperfections both in sentiment and practice are tolerated in the same church, it cannot be denied, that the former is treated with more severity than the latter. If it be more criminal, such treatment is just: but if a Doddridge and a Leighton were not, even in the judgment of our opponents, necessarily more criminal in the sight of God, than the most imperfect of those whom they retain in their communion, it is neither just in itself, nor upon their own principles.

If we consider the matter in another light, the measure under consideration will appear equally incapable of vindication. As it is unquestionably of the nature of *punishment*, so the infliction of every species of punishment is out of place, which has no tendency to reform the offender, or to benefit others by his example; which are its only legitimate ends. Whatever is beside these purposes, is a useless waste of suffering, equally condemned by the dictates of reason and religion. The application of this principle to the case before us, is extremely obvious.

I am far from thinking lightly of the spiritual power with which Christ has armed his church. It is a high and mysterious one, which has no parallel on earth. Nothing, in the order of means, is equally adapted to awaken compunction in the guilty, with spiritual censures impartially administered: the sentence of excommunication in particular, harmonizing with the dictates of conscience, and re-echoed by her voice, is truly terrible: it is the voice of God, speaking through its legitimate organ, which he who despises, or neglects, ranks with "heathen-men and publicans," joins the synagogue of Satan, and takes his lot with an unbelieving world, doomed to perdition.—Excommunication is a sword which, strong in its apparent weakness, and the sharper, and more efficacious for being divested of all sensible and exteriour envelopements, lights immediately on the spirit, and inflicts a wound which no balm can cure, no ointment can mollify, but which must continue to ulcerate and burn, till healed by the blood of atonement, applied by penitence and prayer. In no instance is that axiom more fully verified, "The weakness of God is stronger than men, and the foolishness of God is wiser than men," than in the discipline of his church. By incumbering it with foreign aid, they have robbed it of its real strength; by calling in the aid of temporal pains and penalties, they have removed it from the spirit to the flesh, from its contact with eternity, to unite it to secular interests; and as the corruption of the best things, is the worst, have rendered it the scandal and reproach of our holy religion.

While it retains its character, as a spiritual ordinance, it is the chief bulwark against the disorders which threaten to overturn religion, the very nerve of virtue,

and next to the preaching of the cross, the principal antidote to the "corruptions that are in the world through lust." Discipline in a church, occupies the place of laws in a state; and as a kingdom, however excellent its constitution, will inevitably sink into a state of extreme wretchedness, in which laws are either not enacted, or not duly administered; so a church which pays no attention to discipline, will either fall into confusion, or into a state so much worse, that little or nothing will remain worth regulating. The right of inflicting censures, and of proceeding in extreme cases to excommunication, is an essential branch of that power, with which the church is endowed, and bears the same relation to discipline, that the administration of criminal justice bears to the general principles of government. When this right is exerted in upholding the "faith once delivered to the saints," or enforcing a conscientious regard to the laws of Christ, it maintains its proper place, and is highly beneficial. Its cognizance of doctrine is justified by apostolick authority; "a heretick after two or three admonitions reject;" nor is it to any purpose to urge the difference betwixt ancient hereticks and modern, or that to pretend to distinguish truth from errour is a practical assumption of infallibility. While the truth of the gospel remains, a fundamental contradiction to it is possible, and the difficulty of determining what is so, must be exactly proportioned to the difficulty of ascertaining the import of revelation, which he who affirms to be insurmountable, ascribes to it such an obscurity as must defeat its primary purpose.

He who contends, that no agreement in doctrine is essential to communion, must, if he understand himself, either mean to assert that Christianity contains no fundamental truths, or that it is not necessary that a member of a church should be a Christian. The first of these positions sets aside the necessity of faith altogether; the last is a contradiction in terms. For these reasons, it is required that the operation of discipline should extend to speculative errours, no less than to practical enormities. But since it is not pretended that Pædobaptists are hereticks, it is evident that they are not subject to the cognizance of the church, under that character. As they differ from us merely in the interpretation of a particular

precept, while they avow the same deference to the legislator; the proper antidote to their errour is calm, dispassionate argument, not the exercise of power. Let us present the evidence on which our practice is grounded, to the greatest advantage, to which the display of a conciliating spirit will contribute more than a little; but to proceed with a high hand, and attempt to terminate the dispute by authority, involves an utter misconception of the true nature and object of discipline, which is never to decide what is doubtful, or to elucidate what is obscure, but to promulgate the sentence which the immutable laws of Christ have provided, with the design in the first place, of exciting compunction in the breast of the offender, and next, of profiting others by his example. The solemn decision of a christian assembly, that an individual has forfeited his right to spiritual privileges, and is henceforth consigned to the kingdom of Satan, is an awful proceeding, only inferiour in terrour to the sentence of the last day.

But what is it which renders it so formidable? It is its accordance with the moral nature of man, its harmony with the dictates of conscience, which gives it all its force. When, on the contrary, the pious inquirer is satisfied with his own conduct, viewing it with approbation and complacency; when he is fortified, as in the present instance, by the example of a great majority of the christian world, who are ready to receive him with open arms, and to applaud him for the very practice which has provoked it, how vain is it to expect, that his exclusion from a particular church, will operate a change? When he learns too, that his supposed errour is not pretended to be fatal, but such as may be held with a good conscience, and with faith unfeigned, and is actually held by some of the best of men; it is easy to foresee what sentiments he will feel towards the authors of such a measure, and how little he will be prepared to examine impartially the evidence of that particular opinion, which has occasioned it. Such a proceeding, not having the remotest tendency to inform, or to alarm the conscience, is ineffectual to every purpose of discipline; and as it professedly comprises nothing of the nature of argument, no light can be derived from it, towards the elucidation of a controverted question. It

interposes by authority, instead of reason, where authority can avail nothing, and reason is all in all: and while it is contemptible as an instrument employed to compel unanimity, its power of exciting prejudice and disgust is unrivalled. Such are the mischiefs resulting from confounding together the provinces of discipline and of argument; and since the practice which we have ventured to oppose, if it have any meaning, is intended to operate as a punishment, without answering one of the ends for which it is inflicted, it is high time it were consigned to oblivion.

There is another consideration sufficiently related to the part of the subject before us, to justify my introducing it here, as I would wish to avoid the unnecessary multiplication of divisions. Whatever criminality attaches to the practice of free communion, must entirely consist in *sanctioning* the improper conduct of the parties with whom we unite; and if it be wrong to join with Pædobaptists at the Lord's table, it must be still more so in them to celebrate it. When an action allowed in itself to be innocent or commendable, becomes improper, as performed in conjunction with another, that impropriety must result solely from the moral incompetence to that action, of the party associated. Thus in the instance before us, it must be assumed, that Pædobaptists are *morally culpable* in approaching the sacred symbols, or the attempt to criminate us for *sanctioning* them in that practice, would be ridiculous. As it is allowed that every baptized believer not only may partake, but ought to partake, of that spiritual repast, his uniting with Pædobaptists on that occasion, is liable to objection on no other ground, than that it may be considered as intimating his approbation of *their* conduct in that particular. Upon the principles of our opponents their approach is not only sinful, but sinful to such a degree, as to communicate a moral taint to what, in other circumstances, would be deemed an act of obedience. Here the first question that arises is—Are the advocates of infant-baptism criminal in approaching the Lord's table?

Be it remembered, that our controversy with them respects the ordinance of baptism only, which we suppose them to have misconceived, and that it has no relation to

the only remaining positive institute. Believing, as many of them unquestionably do, that they are as truly baptized as ourselves, and there being no controversy betwixt us on the subject of the eucharist, it is impossible for them, even on the principles of our opponents, to entertain the least scruple respecting the obligation of attending to that ordinance. Admitting it possible for them to believe, what they uniformly and invariably profess, they cannot fail of being fully convinced, that it is their duty to communicate. Under these circumstances, ought they to communicate, or ought they not? If we answer in the negative, we must affirm, that men ought not to pursue that course, which, after the most mature deliberation, the unhesitating dictates of conscience suggest; which would go to obliterate and annul the only immediate rule of human action. Nor can it be objected with truth, that the tendency of this reasoning is to destroy the absolute difference betwixt right and wrong, by referring all to conscience. That, apart from human judgments, there is an intrinsick, moral difference in actions, we freely admit, and hence results the previous obligation of informing the mind, by a diligent attention to the dictates of reason and religion, and of delaying to act till we have sufficient light; but in entire consistence with this, we affirm, that where there is no hesitation, the criterion of *immediate* duty is the suggestion of conscience; whatever guilt may have been previously incurred, by the neglect of serious and impartial inquiry. That this, under the modifications already specified, is the only criterion, is sufficiently evident, from the impossibility of conceiving any other. If it lead (as it easily may, from the neglect of the previous inquiry already mentioned) to a deviation from absolute rectitude, we must not concur in the action in which such deviation is involved.

To apply these principles to the case before us. Whatever blame we may be disposed to attribute to the abettors of infant baptism, on the score of previous inattention, or prejudice, as there is nothing in their principles to cause them to hesitate respecting the obligation of the eucharist, it is unquestionably their *immediate* duty to celebrate it, they would be guilty of a deliberate and wilful offence, were they to neglect it. And as it is *their* duty to act

thus, in compliance with the dictates of conscience, we cannot be guilty of sanctioning what is evil in them, by the approbation implied in joint participation. As far as *they* are concerned, the case seems clear; and no sanction is given to criminal conduct. It remains to be considered only, how the action is situated with respect to ourselves; and here the decision is still more easy, for the action to which we are invited, is not only consistent with rectitude, but would be allowed by all parties, to be an instance of obedience, but for the concurrence of Pædobaptists.—Thus much may suffice in answer to the first question, respecting the supposed criminality of the act of communion, as performed by the advocates of infant baptism: a criminality, which must be assumed as the sole basis of the charges adduced against the practice we are defending.

When we reflect, that the whole of our opponents' reasoning turns upon the disqualification of Pædobaptists for the Lord's supper, it is surprising, that we rarely, if ever, find them contemplate the subject in that light, or advert to the criminality of breaking down that sacred inclosure. The subordinate agents are severely censured, the principal offenders scarcely noticed: and if my reader be disposed to gratify his curiosity, by making a collection of all the uncandid strictures which have been passed upon the advocates of pædobaptism, it is more than probable, the charge of profaning the Lord's supper, would not be found among the number. Yet this is the *original* sin; this the epidemick evil, as widely diffused as the existence of pædobaptist communities: and if it be of such a nature, as to attach a portion of guilt to whatever comes into contact with it; it must, considering its extensive prevalence, be one of the most crying enormities. It is an evil, which has spread much wider than the sacrifice of the mass: it is a pollution which (with the exception of one sect only,) attaches to all flesh, and is unblushingly avowed by the professors of Christianity, in every part of the universe. And what is most surprising, the only persons who have discovered it, instead of lifting up their voice, maintain a profound silence; and while they are sufficiently liberal in their censures, on the popular errour respecting baptism, are not heard to breathe a murmur against this erroneous abuse. In truth, they are so little

impressed with it, that they decline urging it even where the mention of it would seem unavoidable. When they are rebuking us for joining with our Pædobaptist brethren in partaking of a sacrament for which they are supposed to want the due qualifications, it is not *their* presumption in approaching, on which they insist, as might be reasonably expected; on that subject they are silent, while they vehemently inveigh against the imaginary countenance we afford, to the neglect of baptism. Thus they persist in construing our conduct, not into an approval of that act of communion in which we are engaged, but into a tacit admission of the validity of infant baptism, against which we are known to remonstrate. In short, they are disposed to attack our practice in any point, rather than in that in which, if we are wrong, it is alone vulnerable, that of its being an expression of our approbation of Pædobaptists celebrating the Eucharist. In the same spirit, when they have once procured the exclusion of the obnoxious party from their assemblies, they are completely satisfied; their communion elsewhere gives them no concern, though it must be allowed, on the supposition of the pretended disqualification, that the evil remains in its full force. Nor are they ever known to remonstrate with them on this irregularity, during its continuance; nor, should they afterwards become converts to our doctrine, to recal it to their attention, with a view to excite compunction and remorse; so that this is perhaps the only sin for which men are never called to repentance, and of which no man has been known to repent. When our Lord dismissed the woman taken in adultery, though he did not proceed to judge her, he solemnly charged her to *sin no more:* the advocates for strict communion, when they dismiss Pædobaptists, give them no such charge; their language seems to be—"Go, sin by yourselves, and we are satisfied."

The inference I would deduce from these remarkable facts is, that they possess an internal conviction, that the class of Christians whom they proscribe, would be guilty of a great impropriety, in declining to communicate in the sacramental elements; and that the union of Baptists with them in that solemnity, so far from being liable to the imputation of "partaking in other men's sins," is not only lawful, but commendable.

SECTION V.

On the impossibility of reducing the practice of strict communion to any general principle.

When a particular branch of conduct is so circumstanced, as to be incapable of being deduced from some general rule, or of being resolved into some comprehensive principle, founded on reason, or revelation, we may be perfectly assured, it is not obligatory. Whatever is matter of duty, is a part of some *whole*, the relation to which is susceptible of proof, either by the express decision of scripture, or by general reasoning; and a point of practice perfectly insulated, and disjointed from the general system of duties, whatever support it may derive from prejudice, custom or caprice, can never be satisfactorily vindicated. From want of attention to this axiom, both the world and the church have in different periods, been overrun with innumerable forms of superstition and folly; to which the only effectual antidote is, an appeal to principles. Unless I am much mistaken, the question under discussion will afford a striking exemplification of the justness of this remark. If it be found impossible to fix a medium betwixt the toleration of all opinions in religion, and the restriction of it, to errours *not fundamental*, the practice of exclusive communion must be abandoned, because it is neither more nor less than an attempt to establish such a medium. By errours *not fundamental*, I mean such as are admitted to consist with a state of grace and salvation; such as are not supposed to prevent their abettors from being accepted of God.—With such as contend for the indiscriminate admission of all doctrines on the one hand, or with the abettors of rigid uniformity, who allow no latitude of sentiment on the other, we have no concern: since we concur with our opponents in deprecating both these extremes; and while we are tenacious of the "truth as it is in Jesus," we both admit that some indulgence to the mistakes and imperfections of the truly pious is due, from a regard to the dictates of inspiration and the nature of man. The only subject of controversy is, how far that forbearance is to be extended: we assert, to every diversity of judgment, not incompatible with sal-

vation; they contend that a difference of opinion on baptism is an excepted case. If the word of God had clearly and unequivocally made this exception, we should feel ourselves bound to admit it, upon the same principle on which we maintain the infallible certainty of revelation; but when we press for this decision, and request to be directed to the part of scripture which for ever prohibits unbaptized persons from approaching the sacrament, in the same manner as the Jews were prohibited from celebrating the passover, who had not submitted to circumcision, we meet with no reply but precarious inferences, and general reasoning.

However plausible their mode of arguing may appear, the impartial reader will easily perceive it fails in the main point; which is, to establish that *specifick difference* betwixt the case they except out of their list of tolerated errours, and those which they admit, which shall justify this opposite treatment. Thus when they ask whether God has not "commanded baptism; whether it is not the believer's duty to be found in it;"* it is manifest that the same reasons might be urged against bearing with any imperfection in our fellow-christian whatever; for which of these, we ask, is not inconsistent with some command, and a violation, in a greater or less degree, of some duty; with this difference indeed, that many of the imperfections which christian churches are necessitated to bear with, are seated in the will, while the case before us involves merely an unintentional mistake. "It is not every one," says Mr. Booth, "that is received of Jesus Christ, who is entitled to communion at his table; but such, and only such, as revere his authority, submit to his ordinances, and obey the laws of his house." This is the most formal attempt which that writer has made to specify the difference betwixt the case of the abettors of infant baptism, and others; for which reason, the reader will excuse my directing his attention to it for a few moments. We are indebted to him, in the first place, for a new discovery in theology: we should not have suspected, but for his assertion, that there could be a description of persons whom Christ has received, who neither revere his

* Booth's Apology, page 128.

authority, submit to his ordinances, nor obey his laws.—How Mr. Booth acquired this information we know not; but certainly in our Saviour's time it was otherwise. "Then are ye my disciples," said he, "if ye do whatsoever I have commanded you." I congratulate the publick on the prudence evinced by the venerable author, in not publishing the names of these highly privileged individuals, who have proved their title to heaven, to his satisfaction, without reverence, submission, or obedience; wishing his example had been imitated in this particular by the authors of the wonderful conversions of malefactors, many of whom I fear belong to this new sect.

This singular description, however, I scarcely need remind the reader, is designed to characterize Baptists in opposition to Pædobaptists; and were it not the production of a man whom I highly revere, I should comment upon it with the severity it deserves. Suffice it to remark, that to mistake the meaning of a statute, is one thing, not to reverence the legislator, another; that he cannot submit with a good conscience to an ordinance, who is not apprised of its existence; and that a blind obedience, even to divine laws, would be far from constituting a reasonable service. Every conscientious adherent to infant baptism reveres the authority of Christ, not less than a Baptist, and is distinguished by a spirit of submission and obedience to every known part of his will; and as this is all to which a Baptist can pretend, and far more than many, who without scruple are tolerated in our churches, can boast; we are as far as ever from ascertaining the *specifick difference* betwixt the case of the Pædobaptist, and other instances of errour supposed to be entitled to indulgence. In spite of Mr. Booth's marvellous definition, reverence, submission and obedience, are such essential features in the character of a Christian, that he who was judged to be destitute of them, in their substance and reality, would instantly forfeit that character; while to possess them in perfection, is among the brightest acquisitions of eternity. It should be remembered too, that the general principles of morality are not less the laws of Christ, than positive rites, and if we credit Prophets and Apostles, much to be preferred in comparison; so that it must be acknowledged, that he

who is deficient in attention to these, while he is more exemplary in discharging the former than a baptized Christian, (a very frequent case,) stands higher in the scale of obedience. So equivocal is the line of separation here attempted.

When the necessity of tolerating imperfection is once admitted, there remains no point at which it can consistently stop, till it is extended to every gradation of errour, the habitual maintenance of which is compatible with a state of salvation. The reason is, that it is absolutely impossible to define that *species* of errour, so situated as not to preclude its possessor from divine acceptance, although it forfeits his title to the full exercise of christian charity. The Baptists who contend for confining the Lord's supper to themselves, imagine they have found such an errour in the practice of initiating infants into the christian church. But it is observable that they can reduce it to no *class*, nor define it by any *general idea;* and when we urge them with the apostolick injunction, to bear with each other's infirmities, they have nothing to reply, but merely that St. Paul is not speaking of baptism, which is true, because one thing is not another: but it behoves them to shew that the principle he establishes does not *include* this case, and here they are silent.

If we impartially examine the reasons on which we rest the toleration of any supposed errour, we shall find they invariably coincide with the idea of its *not being fundamental.*—If it be alleged for example, that the errour in question relates to a subject less clearly revealed than some others, what is this but to insinuate the ease with which an honest inquirer may mistake respecting it? If the little practical influence it is likely to exert, is alleged as a plea for forbearance, the force of such a remark rests entirely on the assumption of an indissoluble connexion betwixt a state of salvation, and a certain character, which the opinion in question is supposed not to destroy. If we allege the example of eminently pious men, who have embraced it, we infer from analogy the actual safety of the person by whom it is held; and in short, it is impossible to construct an argument for the exercise of mutual forbearance, but what proceeds upon this principle; a principle which pervades the reasoning of our opponents

on every other occasion, except this of strict communion, which they make an insulated case, capriciously exempting it from the arbitration of all the general rules of scripture, as well as from the maxims to which, in all other instances, they are attached.

Reluctant as I feel to trespass on the patience of the reader, by unnecessarily prolonging the discussion, I am anxious, if possible, to set the present argument in a still stronger light. I observe, therefore, that if it be contended that a certain opinion is so obnoxious as to justify the exclusion of its abettor from the privilege of christian fellowship, it must be either on account of its involving a contradiction to the saving truth of the gospel, or on account of its injurious effects on the character. As those of our brethren to whom this reasoning is addressed, positively disclaim considering infant baptism in the former light, they will not attempt to vindicate the exclusion of Pædobaptists on that ground. In vindication of such a measure, they must allege the injurious effects it produces on the character of its abettors. Here, however, they have precluded themselves from the possibility of urging that the injury sustained is *fatal*, by the previous concession, that it does not involve a contradiction to saving truth. Could they, without cancelling that concession, urge the *fatal* nature of the influence in question, they would present an object to the mind sufficiently precise and determinate; an object which may be easily conceived, and accurately defined. But as things are now situated, they can at most only insist on such a kind and degree of deteriorating effect as is consistent with the spiritual safety of the party concerned; and as they are among the first to contend that every species of errour is productive of injurious effects, it is incumbent upon them to point out some consequences worse in their kind, or more aggravated in degree, resulting from this particular *errour*, than what may be fairly ascribed to the worst of those erroneous or defective views, which they are accustomed to tolerate. These injurious consequences must also occupy an intermediate place between two extremes; they must, on the one hand, be decidedly more serious than can be supposed to result from the most crude, undigested, or discordant views, tolerated in regular Baptist

churches, yet not of such a nature on the other, as to involve the danger of eternal perdition. Let them specify, if it be in their power, that ill influence on the character, which is the natural consequence of the tenet of infant sprinkling, considered *per se*, or independent of adventitious circumstances, and the operation of accidental causes, which justifies a treatment of its patrons, so different from what is given to the abettors of other errours. This malignant influence must, I repeat it, be the natural or necessary product of the practice of pædobaptism; because the simple avowal of this is deemed sufficient to incur the forfeiture of church privileges, without further time or inquiry. However vehemently the supporters of such a measure may declaim against it, or however triumphantly expose the principles on which it is founded, they have done nothing towards accomplishing their object—the vindication of strict communion; since the same mode of proceeding might be adopted towards any other misconception, or erroneous opinion; and if it may be forcibly expelled, as soon as it is confuted, there is an end to toleration. Toleration has no place, but in the presence of acknowledged imperfection. It is absolutely necessary for them, as they would vindicate their conduct to the satisfaction of reasonable men, to prove, that some specifick deteriorating effect results from the practice of infant baptism, distinct from the malignant influence of errour in general, and of those imperfections in particular, which are not inconsistent with salvation.

Though the opposition betwixt truth and errour is equal in all cases, and the former always susceptible of proof, as well as the latter of confutation; all errour is not opposed to the *same* truths; and hence arises a distinction betwixt such erroneous and imperfect views of religion, as, however they may, in their remoter consequences, impair, do not contradict the gospel testimony, and such as do. We lay this distinction, as the basis of that forbearance towards the mistakes and imperfections of good men, for which we plead; and as the case of our Pædobaptist brethren is clearly comprehended within that distinction, feel no scruple in admitting them to christian fellowship. We are attached to that distinction,

because it is both scriptural and intelligible; while the hypothesis of the strict Baptists, as they style themselves, is so replete with perplexity and confusion, that for my part, I absolutely despair of comprehending it. It proceeds upon the supposition of a certain medium between two extremes, which they have not even attempted to fix: and as the necessary consequence of this, their reasoning, if we choose to term it such, floats and undulates in such a manner, that it is extremely difficult to grasp it. On the pernicious influence of errour in general, we entertain no doubt, but we demand again and again, to have that precise injurious effect of infant sprinkling pointed out and evinced, which is more to be deprecated, than the probable result of those acknowledged imperfections to which they extend their indulgence. This must surely be deemed a reasonable requisition, though it is one with which they have not hitherto thought fit to comply.

The operation of speculative errour on the mind is one of the profoundest secrets in nature, and to determine the precise quantity of evil resulting from it in any given case, (except the single one of its involving a denial of fundamental truth) transcends the capacity of human nature. We must, in order to form a correct judgment, be not only perfectly acquainted with the nature and tendency of the errour in question, but also with the portion of attention it occupies, as well as the degree of zeal and attachment with which it is embraced. We must determine the force of the counteracting principles, and how far it bears an affinity to the predominant failings of him who maintains it, how far it coalesces with the weaker parts of his moral constitution. These particulars, however, it is next to impossible to explore, when the inquiry respects ourselves; how much more to establish a scale which shall mark by just gradations, the malignant influence of erroneous conceptions on others. On the supposition of a formal denial of saving, essential truth, we feel no difficulty; we may determine, without hesitation, on the testimony of God, that it incurs a forfeiture of the blessings of the new and everlasting covenant, among which the communion of saints holds a distinguished place. But such a supposition is foreign to the present inquiry.

Instead of losing ourselves in a labyrinth of metaphysical subtleties, our only safe guide is an appeal to facts;

and here we find from experience, that the sentiments of the Pædobaptist may consist with the highest attainments of piety, exhibited in modern times, with the most varied and elevated forms of moral grandeur, without impairing the zeal of missionaries, without impeding the march of confessors to their prisons, or of martyrs to the flames. We are willing to acknowledge, these tenets have produced much mischief in communities and nations, who have confounded baptism with regeneration; but the mere belief of the title of infants to that ordinance, is a misconception respecting a positive institute, much less injurious, than if it affected the vital parts of Christianity. But be it what it may, we contend, that it is impossible, without a total disregard to truth and decency, to assert, that it is *intrinsically* and *essentially* more pernicious in its effects, than the numerous errours and imperfections, which the advocates of strict communion feel no scruple in tolerating, in the best organized churches. It is but justice to add, that few or none have attempted to prove that it is so; but have satisfied themselves with a certain vague and loose declamation, better adapted to inflame prejudice, than to produce light or conviction.

In the government of the church, there is a choice of three modes of procedure, each consistent with itself, though not equally compatible with the dictates of reason or scripture. We may either open the doors to persons of all sentiments and persuasions, who maintain the messiahship of Christ; or insist upon an absolute uniformity of belief; or limit the necessity of agreement to articles deemed fundamental, leaving subordinate points to the exercise of private judgment. The strict Baptists have feigned to themselves a fourth, of which it is not less difficult to form a clear and consistent conception, than of a fourth dimension. They have pursued the clue by which other inquirers have been conducted, till they arrived at a certain point, when they refused to proceed a step further, without being able to assign a single reason for stopping, which would not equally prove they had already proceeded too far. They have attempted an incongruous mixture of liberal principles, with a particular act of intolerance; and these, like the iron and clay in the feet of Nebuchadnezzar's image, will not mix. Hence, all

that want of coherence and system in their mode of reasoning, which might be expected in a defence, not of a theory, so properly, as of a capricious sally of prejudice.

Before I close this part of the subject, I must just remark the sensible chagrin, which the venerable Booth betrays, at our insisting on the distinction betwixt fundamentals and non-fundamentals in religion, and the singular manner in which he attempts to evade its force. After observing, that we are wont, in defence of our practice, to plead that the points at issue are not fundamental—"Not fundamental," he indignantly exclaims, "not essential. But in what sense is submission to baptism not essential? To our justifying righteousness, our acceptance with God, or our interest in his favour? So is the Lord's supper, and so is *every part of our obedience.* They (the friends of open communion) will readily allow, that an interest in the divine favour is not obtained by miserable sinners, but granted by the eternal Sovereign: and that acceptance with the High and Holy God is not on conditions performed by us, but in consideration of the vicarious obedience, and propitiatory sufferings of the great Emanuel."

"To the pure, all things are pure." In the mind of Mr. Booth, nothing was associated with this language, I am persuaded, but impressions of piety and devotion; though its unguarded texture and ambiguous tendency are too manifest. For my own part, I am at a loss to put any other construction upon it than this; either that faith and repentance are in no respect conditions of salvation, or that adult baptism is of equal necessity and importance. When it is asked—What is essential to salvation, the gospel-constitution is pre-supposed, the great facts in Christianity assumed; and the true import of the inquiry is—What is essential to a personal interest in the blessings secured by the former, in the felicity of which the latter are the basis? in which light, to reply—The atonement and righteousness of Christ, is egregious trifling, because, being things *out of ourselves*, though the only preliminary basis of human hope, it is absurd to confound them with the characteristick difference betwixt such as are saved, and such as perish. When in like manner an inquiry arises—What is fundamental in reli-

gion, as we must be supposed by religion to intend a system of doctrines to be believed, and of duties to be performed, to direct us to the vicarious obedience of Christ, not as a necessary object of belief, but as a transaction absolute and complete in itself, and to pass over in silence the inherent distinction of character, the faith with its renovating influence to which the promise of life is attached, is, to speak in the mildest terms, to reply in a manner quite irrelevant; and when to this is joined, even by implication, a denial of the existence of such a distinction, we are conducted to the brink of a precipice. The denial of this is the very core of antinomianism, to which it is painful to see so able a writer, and so excellent a man as Mr. Booth, make the slightest approach. We would seriously ask, whether it be intended to deny, that the belief of any doctrines, or the infusion of any principles or dispositions whatever, is essential to future happiness; if this be intended, it supersedes the use and necessity of every branch of internal religion. If it is not, we ask, Are correct views on the subject of baptism to be classed among those doctrines?

Had we been contending for an indulgence towards such as are convinced of the obligation of believers' baptism, but refuse to act up to their convictions, and shrink from the cross, some parts of the expostulation we have quoted, might be considered as pertinent; but to attempt to explain away a distinction, the most important in theology, the only centre of harmony, the only basis of peace and concord, and the grand bulwark opposed to the sophistry of the church of Rome, is a humiliating instance of the temerity and imprudence incident to the best of men. The Jesuit Twiss, in that controversy with the Protestants, which gave occasion to the inimitable defence of their principles by the immortal Chillingworth, betrayed the same impatience with our author at this distinction; though in perfect consistence with the doctrines of a church, which pretends, by an appeal to an infallible tribunal, to decide every controversy, and to preclude every doubt.

Nothing but an absolute despair of giving a satisfactory reply to the arguments drawn from this quarter, could have tempted Mr. Booth to quarrel with a distinction so

justly dear to all Protestants; and it is no small presumption of the justness of our sentiments, that the attempt to refute them is found to require the subversion of the most received axioms in theology, together with the strange paradox, that while much more than we suppose is necessary to communion, nothing is essential to salvation. In consideration, however, of the embarrassment of our opponents, we feel it easy to overlook the effusions of their discontent; but as it is not usual to consult the enemy on the choice of weapons, we shall continue to employ such as we find most efficacious, though they may not be the most pleasant to the touch.

SECTION VI.

The impolicy of the practice of strict communion considered.

In the affairs of religion and morality, where a divine authority is interposed, the first and chief attention is due to its dictates, which we are not permitted to violate in the least instance, though we proposed by such violation to promote the interests of religion itself. She scorns to be indebted even for conquest, to a foreign force: the weapons of her warfare are not carnal. We have on this account carefully abstained from urging the imprudence of the measure we have ventured to oppose, from an apprehension that we might be suspected of attempting to bias the suffrage of our readers, by considerations and motives disproportioned to the majesty of revealed truth. But having, as I trust, sufficiently shewn that the practice of strict communion derives no support from that quarter, the way is open for the introduction of a few remarks on the natural tendency and effect of the two opposite systems. I would just premise, that I hope no offence will be given to Pædobaptists by denominating their sentiments on the subject of baptism *erroneous*, as though it were expected that our assertion should be accepted for proof. It is designed as a simple statement of my opinion; and is assumed as the basis of my reasoning with my stricter brethren.

Truth and errour, as they are essentially opposite in their nature, so the causes to which they are indebted for their perpetuity and triumph, are not less so. Whatever retards a spirit of inquiry, is favourable to errour; whatever promotes it, to truth. But nothing, it will be acknowledged, has a greater tendency to obstruct the exercise of free inquiry, than the spirit and feeling of a party. Let a doctrine, however erroneous, become a party distinction, and it is at once intrenched in interests and attachments, which make it extremely difficult for the most powerful artillery of reason to dislodge it. It becomes a point of honour in the leaders of such parties, which is from thence communicated to their followers, to defend and support their respective peculiarities to the last; and as a natural consequence, to shut their ears against all the pleas and remonstrances by which they are assailed. Even the wisest and best of men are seldom aware how much they are susceptible of this sort of influence; and while the offer of a world would be insufficient to engage them to recant a known truth, or to subscribe an acknowledged errour, they are often retained in a willing captivity to prejudices and opinions, which have no other support, and which, if they could lose sight of party feelings, they would almost instantly abandon. To what other cause can we ascribe the attachment of Fenelon and of Pascal, men of exalted genius, and undoubted piety, to the doctrine of transubstantiation, and other innumerable absurdities of the church of Rome? It is this alone which has ensured a sort of immortality to those hideous productions of the human mind, the shapeless abortions of night and darkness, which reason, left to itself, would have crushed in the moment of their birth.

It is observable, that scientifick truths make their way in the world, with much more ease and rapidity than religious. No sooner is a philosophical opinion promulgated, than it undergoes at first a severe and rigorous scrutiny; and if it is found to coincide with the results of experiment, it is speedily adopted, and quietly takes it place among the improvements of the age. Every acquisition of this kind is considered as a common property; as an accession to the general stores of mental opulence. Thus the knowledge of nature, the further it advances from its

head, not only enlarges its channel by the accession of tributary streams, but gradually purifies itself from the mixture of errour. If we search for the reason of the facility, with which scientifick improvements established themselves in preference to religious, we shall find it in the absence of combination, in their being no class of men closely united, who have an interest, real or imaginary, in obstructing their progress. We hear, it is true, of parties in the republick of letters; but if such language is not to be considered as entirely allusive and metaphorical, the ties which unite them are so slight and feeble, compared to those which attach to religious societies, as scarcely to deserve the name. The spirit of party was much more sensibly felt in the ancient schools of philosophy than in modern, on account of philosophical inquiries embracing a class of subjects, which are now considered as no longer belonging to its province. Before revelation appeared, whatever is most deeply interesting in the contemplation of God, of man, or of a future state, fell under the cognizance of philosophy; and hence, it was cultivated with no inconsiderable portion of that moral sensibility, that solicitude and alternation of hope and fear, respecting an invisible state, which are now absorbed by the gospel. From that time, the departments of theology and philosophy have become totally distinct; and the genius of the former, free and unfettered.

In religious inquiries, few feel themselves at liberty to follow, without restraint, the light of evidence, and the guidance of truth, in consequence of some previous engagement with a party; and though the attachment to it might originally be purely voluntary, and still continues such, the natural love of consistency, the fear of shame, together with other motives sufficiently obvious, powerfully contribute to perpetuate and confirm it. When an attachment to the fundamental truths of religion is the basis of the alliance, the steadiness, constancy, and perseverance it produces, are of the utmost advantage; and hence, we admire the wisdom of Christ, in employing and consecrating the social nature of man in the formation of a church. It is utterly impossible, to calculate the benefits of the publicity and support, which Christianity derives from that source; nor will it be doubted, that the

intrepidity evinced in confessing the most obnoxious truths, and enduring all the indignities and sufferings which result from their promulgation, is in a great measure to be ascribed to the same cause. The concentration of the wills and efforts of Christians, rendered the church a powerful antagonist to the world. But when the christian profession became split and divided into separate communities, each of which, along with certain fundamental truths, retained a portion of errour, its reformation became difficult, just in proportion to the strength of these combinations. Religious parties imply a tacit compact, not merely to sustain the fundamental truths of revelation, (which was the original design of the constitution of a church) but also to uphold the incidental peculiarities by which they are distinguished. They are so many ramparts or fortifications, erected in order to give security and support to certain systems of doctrine and discipline, beyond what they derive from their native force and evidence.

The difficulty of reforming the corruptions of Christianity is great, in a state of things, where the fear of being eclipsed, and the anxiety in each denomination to extend itself as much as possible, engage, in spite of the personal piety of its members, all the solicitude and ardour which are not immediately devoted to the most essential truths; where correct conceptions, on subordinate subjects, are scarcely aimed at, but the particular views which the party has adopted, are either objects of indolent acquiescence, or zealous attachment. In such a state, opinions are no otherwise regarded, than as they affect the interest of a party; whatever conduces to augment its members, or its credit, must be supported at all events; whatever is of a contrary tendency, discountenanced and suppressed. How often do we find much zeal expended in the defence of sentiments, recommended neither by their evidence nor their importance, which, could their incorporation with an established creed be forgotten, would be quietly consigned to oblivion. Thus the waters of life, instead of that unobstructed circulation which would diffuse health, fertility, and beauty, are diverted from their channels, and drawn into pools and reservoirs, where, from their stagnant state, they acquire feculence and pollution.

The inference we would deduce from these facts is, that if we wish to revive an exploded truth, or to restore an obsolete practice, it is of the greatest moment to present it to the publick, in a manner least likely to produce the collision of party. But this is equivalent to saying, in other words, that it ought not to be made the basis of a sect; for the prejudices of party are always reciprocal, and in no instance is that great law of motion more applicable, that re-action is always equal to action, and contrary thereto. While it is maintained as a private opinion, by which I mean one not characteristick of a sect, it stands upon its proper merits, mingles with facility in different societies, and in proportion to its evidence, and the attention it excites, insinuates itself like leaven, till the whole is leavened.

Such, it should seem, was the conduct of the Baptists before the time of Luther. It appears, from the testimony of ecclesiastical historians, that their sentiments prevailed to a considerable extent among the Waldenses and Albigenses, the precursors of the Reformation, to whom the crime of anabaptism is frequently ascribed, among other heresies: it is probable, however, that it did not prevail universally; nor is there the smallest trace to be discovered, of its being made a term of communion. When the same opinions on this subject were publickly revived in the sixteenth century, under the most unfavourable auspices, and allied with turbulence, anarchy, and blood, no wonder they met with an unwelcome reception, and that, contemplated through such a medium, they incurred the reprobation of the wise and good. Whether the English Baptists held at first any part of the wild and seditious sentiments of the German fanaticks, it is difficult to say; supposing they did, (of which I am not aware there is the smallest evidence) it is certain they soon abandoned them, and adopted the same system of religion with other non-conformists, except on the article of baptism. But it is much to be lamented, that they continued to insist on that article as a term of communion, by which they excited the resentment of other denominations, and facilitated the means of confounding them with the German Anabaptists, with whom they possessed nothing in common, besides an opinion on one particular

rite. One feature of resemblance, however, joined to an identity of name, was sufficient to surmount, in the publick feeling, the impression of all the points of discrepancy or of contrast, and to subject them to a portion of the infamy attached to the ferocious insurgents of Munster. From that period, the success of the baptist sentiments became identified with the growth of a sect, which, rising under the most unfavourable auspices, was entirely destitute of the resources of worldly influence, and the means of popular attraction; and an opinion which, by its native simplicity and evidence, is entitled to command the suffrages of the world, was pent up and confined within the narrow precincts of a party, where it laboured under an insupportable weight of prejudice. It was seldom examined by an impartial appeal to the sacred oracles, or regarded in any other light, than as the whimsical appendage of a sect, who disgraced themselves at the outset, by the most criminal excesses, and were, at no subsequent period, sufficiently distinguished by talents or numbers, to command general attention.

Nothing is more common, than for zeal to overshoot its mark. If a determined enemy of the Baptists had been consulted on the most effectual method of rendering their principles unpopular, there is little doubt but that he would have recommended the very measures we have pursued: the first and most obvious effect of which has been to generate an inconceivable mass of prejudice in other denominations. To proclaim to the world our determination, to treat as "heathen-men and publicans," all who are not immediately prepared to concur with our views of baptism, what is it less, than the language of hostility and defiance; admirably adapted to discredit the party which exhibits, and the principles which have occasioned such a conduct. By thus investing these principles with an importance which does not belong to them, by making them co-extensive with the existence of a church, they have indisposed men to listen to the evidence by which they are supported; and attempting to establish by authority, the unanimity which should be the fruit of conviction, have deprived themselves of the most effectual means of producing it. To say, that such a mode of proceeding is not adapted to convince, that re-

fusing Pædobaptists the right of communion has no tendency to produce a change of views, is to employ most inadequate language: it has a powerful tendency to the contrary; it can scarcely fail to produce impressions most unfavourable to the system with which it is connected, impressions which the gentlest minds find it difficult to distinguish from the effects of insult and degradation.

It is not, however, merely by this sort of re-action, that prejudice is excited, unfavourable to the extension of our principles; but by the instinctive feelings of self-defence.—Upon the system of strict communion, the moment a member of a pædobaptist church becomes convinced of the invalidity of his infant baptism, he must deem it obligatory upon him to relinquish his station, and dissolve his connexion with the church; and as superiority of ministerial talents and character is a mere matter of preference, but duty a matter of necessity, he must at all events connect himself with a baptist congregation, whatever sacrifice it may cost him, and whatever loss he may incur. Though his pastor should possess the profundity and unction of an Edwards, or the eloquence of a Spencer, he must quit him for the most superficial declaimer, rather than be guilty of spiritual fornication. How is it possible for principles fraught with such a corollary, not to be contemplated with anxiety by our pædobaptist brethren, who, however they might be disposed to exercise candour towards our sentiments, considered in themselves, cannot fail to perceive the most disorganizing tendency in this their usual appendage. Viewed in such a connexion, their prevalence is a blow at the very root of pædobaptist societies, since the moment we succeed in making a convert, we disqualify him for continuing a member. We deposit a seed of alienation and discord, which threatens their dissolution; so that we need not be surprised if other denominations should be tempted to compare us to the Euphratean horsemen in the apocalypse, who are described as "having tails like scorpions, and with them they did hurt."

To these causes we must undoubtedly impute the superiour degree of prejudice displayed by that class of Christians, to whom we make the nearest approach, compared to such as are separated from us by a wider inter-

val. A disposition to fair and liberal concession on the points at issue, is almost confined to the members of established churches; and while the most celebrated episcopal divines, both Popish and Protestant, as well as those of the Scotch church, feel no hesitation in acknowledging the import of the word baptize is to *immerse*, that such was the primitive mode of baptism, and that the right of infants to that ordinance is rather to be sustained on the ground of ancient usage than the authority of scripture, our dissenting brethren are displeased with these concessions, deny there is any proof that immersion was ever used in primitive times, and speak of the extension of baptism to infants with as much confidence, as though it were amongst the plainest and most undeniable dictates of revelation.*

To such a height has this animosity been carried, that there are not wanting persons, who seem anxious to revive the recollection of Munster, and by republishing the narrative of the enormities perpetrated there, under the

* Campbell, speaking of the authors of the vulgate version, observes—"Some words they have transferred from the original into their language; others they have translated. But it would not be always easy to find their reason for making this difference. Thus the word περιτομη they have translated *circumcisio*, which exactly corresponds in etymology; but the word βαπτισμα they have retained, changing only the letters from Greek to Roman. Yet the latter was just as susceptible of a literal version into Latin as the former. *Immersio, tinctio*, answers as exactly in one case, as *circumcisio* in the other." A little after he observes—"I should think the word immersion (which though of Latin origin, is an English noun, regularly formed from the word to *immerse*,) a better English name than baptism, were we now at liberty to make a choice; but we are not."—*Preliminary Dissertations to the Translation of the Gospels, page* 354, 355, 4to. ed.——He elsewhere mentions it as one of the strongest instances of prejudice, that he has known some persons of piety who have denied, that the word baptize signifies to immerse.

With respect to the *subject*, it is worthy of observation, that the authors of the celebrated scheme of popish doctrine and discipline called the *Interim*, enumerate the baptism of infants among *traditions*, and that in the most emphatick manner. For having stated that the church has two rules of faith, scripture and tradition, they observe, after treating of the first, "*ecclesia habet quoque traditiones, inter alia baptismus parvulorum*," &c. They mention, however, no other, from whence it is natural to infer, that they considered this as the strongest instance of that species of rules. The total silence of scripture has induced not a few of the most illustrious scholars to consider infant baptism not of divine right; amongst whom, were we disposed to boast of great names, we might mention Salmasius, Suicer, and above all, Sir Isaac Newton, who, if we may believe the honest Whiston, frequently declared to him his conviction that the Baptists were the only Christians who had not symbolised with the church of Rome.—*See Whiston's Memoirs of his own Life.*

title of the History of the Baptists, to implicate us in the infamy and guilt of those transactions. While we must reprobate such a spirit, we are compelled to acknowledge, that the practice of exclusive communion is admirably adapted to excite it, in minds of a certain order.

That practice is not less objectionable on another ground. By discouraging Pædobaptists from frequenting our assemblies, it militates against the most effectual means of diffusing the sentiments which we consider most consonant to the sacred oracles. It cannot be expected, that pious worshippers will attend, except from absolute necessity, where they are detained, if we may so speak, in the courts of the Gentiles, and denied access to the interiour privileges of the sanctuary.

The congregations accordingly, where this practice prevails, are almost entirely composed of persons of our own persuasion, who are so far from requiring an additional stimulus, that it is much oftener necessary to restrain than to excite their ardour; while the only description of persons who could be possibly benefited by instruction, are out of its reach; compelled by this intolerant practice to join societies, where they will hear nothing but what is adapted to confirm them in their ancient prejudices. Thus an impassable barrier is erected betwixt the Baptists and other denominations, in consequence of which, few opportunities are afforded of trying the effect of calm and serious argumentation, in situations where alone it could prove effectual. In those baptist churches in which an opposite plan has been adopted, the attendance of such as are not of our sentiments meeting with no discouragement, is often extensive: Baptists and Pædobaptists, by participating in the same privileges, become closely united in the ties of friendship; of which the effect is uniformly found to be a perpetual increase in the number of the former, compared to the latter, till in some societies the opposite sentiments have nearly subsided and disappeared.

Nor is this more than might be expected from the nature of things, supposing us to have truth on our side. For admitting this to be the case, what can give permanence to the sentiments to which we are opposed, except a recumbent indolence, or an active prejudice; and is it

not evident, that the practice of exclusive communion has the strongest tendency to foster both those evils, the former by withdrawing, I might say repelling, the erroneous from the best means of instruction, the latter by the apparent harshness and severity of such a proceeding. It is not by keeping at a distance from mankind, that we must expect to acquire an ascendancy over them, but by approaching, by conciliating them, and securing a passage to their understanding through the medium of their hearts. Truth will glide into the mind through the channel of the affections, which, were it to approach in the naked majesty of evidence, would meet with a certain repulse.

Betraying a total ignorance or forgetfulness of these indubitable facts, what is the conduct of our opponents? They assume a menacing aspect, proclaim themselves the only true church, and assert, that they alone are entitled to the christian sacraments. None are alarmed at this language, none are induced to submit, but turning with a smile or a frown to gentler leaders, they leave us to triumph without a combat, and to dispute without an opponent.

If we consider the way in which men are led to form just conclusions on the principal subjects of controversy, we shall not often find, that it is the fruit of an independent effort of mind, determined to search for truth in her most hidden recesses, and discover her under every disguise. The number of such elevated spirits is small; and though evidence is the only source of rational conviction, a variety of favourable circumstances usually contribute to bring it into contact with the mind, such as frequent intercourse, a favourable disposition towards the party which maintains it, habits of deference and respect, and gratitude for benefits received. The practice of confining the communion to our own denomination, seems studiously contrived to preclude us from these advantages, and to transfer them to the opposite side.

The policy of intolerance is exactly proportioned to the capacity of inspiring fear. The Church of Rome for many ages practised it, with infinite advantage, because she possessed ample means of intimidation. Her pride grew with her success, her intolerance with her pride; and she did not aspire to the lofty pretension of being the

only *true church*, till she saw monarchs at her feet, and held kingdoms in chains; till she was flushed with victory, giddy with her elevation, and drunk with the blood of the saints. But what was policy in her, would be the height of infatuation in us, who are neither entitled by our situation, nor by our crimes, to aspire to this guilty pre-eminence. I am fully persuaded, that few of our brethren have duly reflected on the strong resemblance which subsists betwixt the pretensions of the Church of Rome, and the principles implied in strict communion; both equally intolerant, the one armed with pains and penalties, the other, I trust, disdaining such aid; the one the intolerance of power, the other of weakness.

From a full conviction that our views, as a denomination, correspond with the dictates of scripture, it is impossible for me to entertain a doubt of their ultimate prevalence; but unless we retrace our steps, and cultivate a cordial union with our fellow-christians, I greatly question whether their success will in any degree be ascribable to our efforts. It is much more probable, that the light will arise in another quarter, from persons by whom we are unknown, but who, in consequence of an unction from the Holy One, are led to examine the scripture with perfect impartiality, and in the ardour of their pursuit after truth, alike to overlook the misconduct of those who have opposed, and of those who have maintained it.

Happily, the final triumph of truth is not dependant on human modes of exhibition.—Man is the recipient, not the author of it: it partakes of the nature of the Deity; it is his offspring, its indissoluble relation to whom is a surer pledge of its perpetuity and support, than finite power or policy. While we are at a certainty respecting the final issue, "the times and the seasons God hath put in his own power;" nor are we ever more liable to err, than when in surveying the purposes of God, we descend from the elevation of general views, to a minute specification of times and instruments. How long the ordinance of baptism, in its purity and simplicity, may be doomed to neglect, it is not for us to conjecture; but of this we are fully persuaded, it will never be generally restored o the church through the medium of a party. This

mode of procedure has been already sufficiently tried, and is found utterly ineffectual.

The labour bestowed upon these sheets has not arisen from an indifference to the interests of truth, but from a sincere wish to promote them, by disengaging it from the unnatural confinement in which it has been detained by the injudicious conduct of its advocates. How far the reasoning adduced, or the spirit displayed on this subject, is entitled to approbation, must be left to the judgment of the religious publick. If any offence has been given by the appearance of unbecoming severity, it will give me real concern; and the more so, because there are not a few amongst our professed opponents in this controversy, to whom I look up with undissembled esteem and veneration.

Having omitted nothing which appeared essentially connected with the subject, I hasten to close this disquisition; previously to which, it may not be improper briefly to recal the attention to the principal topicks of argument. We have endeavoured to shew that the practice of strict communion derives no support from the supposed priority of baptism to the Lord's supper in the order of institution, which order is exactly the reverse; that it is not countenanced by the tenour of the Apostle's commission, nor by apostolick precedent, the spirit of which is in our favour, proceeding on principles totally dissimilar to the case under discussion; that the opposite practice is enforced by the obligations of christian charity; that it is indubitably comprehended within the canon which enjoins forbearance towards mistaken brethren; that the system of our opponents *unchurches* every Pædobaptist community; that it rests on no general principle; that it attempts to establish an impossible medium: that it inflicts a punishment which is capricious and unjust; and finally, that by fomenting prejudice, and precluding the most effectual means of conviction, it defeats its own purpose.

Should the reasoning under any one of these heads be found to be conclusive, however it may fail in others, it will go far towards establishing our leading position, that no church has a right to establish *terms of communion, which are not terms of salvation.* With high consideration of the talents of many of my brethren who differ from me,

I have yet no apprehension that the sum total of the argument admits a satisfactory reply.

A tender consideration of human imperfection is not merely the dictate of revelation, but the law of nature, exemplified in the most striking manner, in the conduct of him whom we all profess to follow. How wide the interval which separated his religious knowledge and attainments from that of his disciples; he, the fountain of illumination, they encompassed with infirmities. But did he recede from them on that account? No: he drew the bond of union closer, imparted successive streams of effulgence, till he incorporated his spirit with theirs, and elevated them into a nearer resemblance of himself. In imitating by our conduct towards our mistaken brethren this great exemplar, we cannot err. By walking together with them as far as we are agreed, our agreement will extend, our differences lessen, and love, which rejoiceth in the truth, will gradually open our hearts to higher and nobler inspirations.

Might we indulge a hope, that not only our denomination, but every other description of Christians, would act upon these principles, we should hail the dawn of a brighter day, and consider it as a nearer approach to the ultimate triumph of the church, than the annals of time have yet recorded. In the accomplishment of our Saviour's prayer, we should behold a demonstration of the divinity of his mission, which the most impious could not resist; we should behold in the church a peaceful haven, inviting us to retire from the tossings and perils of this unquiet ocean, to a sacred inclosure, a sequestered spot, which the storms and tempests of the world were not permitted to invade.

> "Intus aquæ dulces, vivoque sedilia saxo;
> Nympharum domus: hic fessas non vincula naves
> Ulla tenent, unco non alligat anchora morsu." VIRGIL.

The genius of the gospel, let it once for all be remembered, is not ceremonial, but spiritual, consisting not in meats or drinks, or outward observances, but in the cultivation of such interiour graces, as compose the essence of virtue, perfect the character, and purify the heart. These form the soul of religion; all the rest are but her

terrestrial attire, which she will lay aside when she passes the threshold of eternity. When, therefore, the obligations of humility and love come into competition with a punctual observance of external rites, the genius of religion will easily determine to which we should incline: but when the question is not, whether we shall attend to them ourselves, but whether we shall enforce them on others, the answer is still more ready. All attempts to urge men forward even in the right path, beyond the measure of their light, are impracticable in our situation, if they were lawful; and unlawful, if they were practicable. Augment their light, conciliate their affections, and they will follow of their own accord.

POSTSCRIPT.

An objection to the hypothesis which assigns the origin of *christian* baptism to the commission which the Apostles received at our Lord's resurrection, may possibly be urged from the baptisms performed by his disciples during his personal ministry; and as no notice is taken of that circumstance in the body of the work, I beg leave to submit the following observations to the reader:—We are informed by one of the evangelists, that Christ, by the instrumentality of his disciples, at one period "made and baptized more disciples than John."* The following remarks may possibly cast some light on this subject:—

1. A divine commission was given to the son of Zechariah, to announce the speedy manifestation of the Messiah; or which is equivalent, to declare that "the Kingdom of God was at hand;" with an injunction solemnly to immerse in water as many as, in consequence of that intelligence, professed repentance and reformation of life; and as he was the only person who had been known to initiate his disciples by that rite, it was natural for him to be distinguished by the appellation of the Baptist, or the Immerser. The scriptures are totally silent respecting any mission to baptize apart from his. It is by no means certain, however, that he was the only person who performed that ceremony: indeed, when we consider the prodigious multitudes who flocked to him, the "inhabitants of Jerusalem, Judæa, and all the region round about Jordan," it seems scarcely practicable: he most probably employed coadjutors, though the practice having originated with him, it was foreign to the purpose of the evangelists to notice that circumstance.

2. Our Lord, who had already evinced the profoundest respect to his mission, by receiving baptism at his hands, was, in consequence of his being the Messiah, undoubtedly authorized personally to perform any religious rite or

* John iv. 1.

office which was at that time in force, as well as to delegate to others the power of performing it; and as immersion in token of repentance and preparation for the Kingdom of God, then at hand, was an important branch of the religion then obligatory, it was with the greatest propriety that he not only submitted to it himself, but authorized his disciples to perform it. This, however, is by no means sufficient to constitute a distinct rite or ordinance; and since it was not accompanied with a distinct confession of faith, nor possessed any distinct signification, it could not be considered as originating a new institution, but as a mere co-operation with his forerunner in one and the same work.

3. We have already shewn at large, that the principal difference betwixt John's baptism, and that which the Apostles were commissioned to perform after our Saviour's ascension, consisted in the former not being celebrated in the name of Jesus. But there is just as much difficulty in supposing it performed by his disciples in that name, during his abode on earth, as by his forerunner. It would have equally defeated the purpose of that caution which he uniformly maintained; and it is absurd to suppose, that he would strictly charge his disciples to tell no man that he was the Christ, while he authorized them to disclose that very secret to the mixed multitude, as often as they baptized; nor could the use of his name, in that ordinance, be separated from such a disclosure.

4. In addition to this, it must be remembered, that John and our Lord (by the hands of his disciples) both baptized at the same period: their ministry was contemporary. Now if we assert, that our Lord enjoined one confession of faith in baptism, and John another, we shall have different dispensations of religion subsisting at the same time, and must suppose the people were under an obligation to believe one thing, as the disciples of John, and another, as the disciples of Christ. But this it is impossible to admit. There is unquestionably at all seasons, a perfect harmony in the economies of religion, so that two different ones are never in force at one and the same time. The first ceases when the next succeeds, just as Judaism was abolished by Christianity, and the Patriarchal dispensation superseded by Judaism. Unless we

are prepared to assert, that the dispensations of religion are not obligatory, one light in which they must be considered, is that of different laws, or codes of law; but it is essential to the nature of laws, that the new one, except it be merely declaratory, invariably repeals the old. In whatever particular it differs, it necessarily abolishes or annuls the former. But as John continued to baptize by divine authority, at the same time with the disciples of our Saviour, it is evident, his institution was not superseded. Consequently, it was of such a nature, that it could subsist in conjunction with the baptisms performed by our Lord, through the hands of his Apostles. But for the reason already alleged, this could not have been the case, unless it had been one and the same thing. The inference I wish to deduce from the whole, is, that the baptisms celebrated by Christ's disciples, during his personal ministry, in no respect differed from John's, either in the action itself, or in the import, but were merely a joint execution of the same work; agreeably to which, we find a perfect identity in the language which our Saviour enjoined his disciples to use, and in the preaching of John: "Repent ye, for the Kingdom of God is at hand." Whatever information our Lord imparted to his disciples, beyond that which was communicated by his forerunner, (which we all know was much) was given in detached portions, at distinct intervals, and was never embodied or incorporated with any positive institution, till after his ascension, which may be considered as the commencement of the christian dispensation in its strictest sense.

THE END.

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